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CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Case Farm Tourism Ilomäki

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FOREWORD

This research was carried out as final thesis in Vaasa University of Applied Sciences, in study program of Business Economics. The research was done for Farm Tourism Iloäki.

I would like to thank Farm Tourism Iloäki's personnel for great help and for giving me the opportunity to carry out this research.

I would also like to thank Jyri and my family for all the support and also for not asking too many questions even though doing this thesis took a bit longer than expected.

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ABSTRACT

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This research was done as final thesis in Vaasa University of Applied Sciences, in the study program of Business Economics. The aim for the research was to find out the customer satisfaction level of Farm Tourism Ilomäki as customers concerning service and premises.

The theoretical study of the research examines customers, customer satisfaction, customer service and competition means of customer relationship marketing. At the beginning of empirical study marketing research theoretical is examined, after that the questionnaire questions are introduced. After this the research results are examined one by one. At the end it is shown how the theoretical is connected to the empirical study and the results are summarized.

The questionnaire was handed out at the case company for two months, from mid August to mid of October. The results showed that the customers are mainly satisfied with all the aspects of the company. There was not much negative feedback but the company got positive feedback even more. Good service got special thanks.

The reliability of the research was examined from different aspects with the help of reliability and validity. The reliability and validity of the research can be regarded good.

Keywords	Customer, Customer Satisfaction, Service
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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä	Marjo Tuomi
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Tämä tutkimus on tehty Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulun liiketalouden koulutusohjelman päättötyönä. Työn tarkoitus oli selvittää Maatilamatkailu Ilomäen asiakastyytyväisyyttä, palvelun ja tilojen suhteen.

Tutkimuksen teoriaosuus käsittelee asiakasta, asiakastyytyväisyyttä, asiakaspalvelua ja asiakassuhdemarkkinoinnin kilpailukeinoja. Empirian aluksi käyn läpi markkinointitutkimuksen teoriaa, jonka jälkeen käydään läpi kyselylomakkeen kysymykset. Tämän jälkeen esitellään tutkimuksen tulokset kysymys kerrallaan. Lopuksi kerron miten teoria on yhteydessä empiriaan ja teen yhteenvedon.

Kysely oli jaossa maatilamatkailussa elokuun puolivälistä lokakuun puoliväliin. Vastauksista selvisi, että yrityksen asiakkaat ovat tyytyväisiä pääosin kaikin puolin. Negatiivista palautetta ei juurikaan tullut, positiivista sitäkin enemmän. Erityisesti hyvä palvelu sai kiitosta.

Tutkimuksen luotettavuutta tarkasteltiin monesta näkökulmasta reliabiliteetin ja validiteetin avulla. Lopputulos oli, että tutkimuksen reliabiliteettia ja validiteettia voidaan pitää hyvänä.

Asiasanat	Asiakas, Asiakastyytyväisyys, Palvelu
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I INTRODUCTION

The goal of the introduction part is to give the reader a short introduction to the topic. In this section the goals and the structure of the research are introduced. Also, there is a short description of the case company.

1. INTRODUCTION

Good service and customer satisfaction are very important for companies for both small and big companies, but especially so for small companies. Today competition between companies is growing all the time and that is why good service is becoming more and more important.

When a company manages to serve its customers well enough and make them happy company can create long-term customer relationships and possibly get free marketing at the same time when satisfied customers tell about the good service they got. Satisfied customers have a positive impact on the company's results and that is why it is important and interesting to investigate this impact. When measuring customer satisfaction it is possible to get useful information of the company customers and the results can be used to improve the company and its services. You get an exact idea what your customers want and you can start developing the services. Measuring customer satisfaction should be a continuous process that is carried out regularly, not just once: if it is done regularly the results will be more beneficial.

This research is done to get an idea of customer satisfaction; the company has not carried out any big research studies before. That is one reason why I found it interesting to do this research just for this company.

1.1 Goals

The goal of this study is to find out the company customers' level of satisfaction and how satisfied the customers are with the service and the accommodation facilities. Another goal is to find out if customers are dissatisfied with something, why and

what kind of improvement suggestions they have. Therefore the goal is to identify areas that still need to be improved so that those areas can be further developed. One goal is also to find out the areas to which customers find successful. The results are to be shown so that the company can use the results, for example, in their marketing in the future.

1.2. Defining the research problem

The intention of this study was to find out the level of satisfaction of the company customers. At the same time the company would get some information about its customers. The questionnaire was at the case company for two months.

When defining the research problem I decided that the survey was aimed for customers above 11 years-old. Respondents above 11-years-old are mature enough to answer the questions. Otherwise all who were willing to answer the questionnaire had the chance to do that.

1.3 The structure of the research

The research is divided into three sections: Introduction, theoretical study and empirical study. In the introduction the reader is led to the subject and also the goals and restrictions of the research are introduced. It is also discussed what farm tourism means. Finally, the case company itself is introduced.

In the theoretical study the theoretical base for empirical research is created. In the empirical section the results of the research are shown and analyzed. Also, the conclusions based on the research are introduced. The results are connected to the theoretical study part and the reliability of the research is considered. Also, further research suggestions are introduced.

1.4 Farm tourism

Farm tourism resorts are basically farms or places that used to be farms before. Some farmers establish farm tourism places in order to make more money, for some the

farm tourism might also be the only source of money but mainly these are just side businesses that are established just because there is a chance for it and it brings some change into the daily lives of the farm owners. The boom for farm tourism places started basically when a lot of small farms were closed and the farms got lot of free space.

1.5 Farm tourism Ilomäki

Farm tourism Ilomäki is located in Seinäjoki, in a small village which was previously an independent municipality called Peräseinäjoki. From Ilomäki the distance to the village centre is 4 kilometres and to the Seinäjoki's centre it is approximately 30 kilometres.

The company is family-owned. It is run by Reijo and Päivi Ilomäki and their daughter Merja. Reijo and Päivi have taken over the farm already in 1989 and ten years later, in 1999 Farm Tourism Ilomäki was established when the farm's previous main building was put into accommodation use for the guests.

There are several accommodation facilities. At the moment there are the main building, the creek-side cottage, the new log cottage and the one-room flat. Reijo has new ideas all the time which could be taken into use after a while.

According to the agreement with the customers there are also available hunting trips and horseback riding. If someone is interested Reijo is also willing to show the guests real farm work. Quite near by there is also a bird watching tower to which you can go by canoeing from the creek-side cottage.

The yearly visitor number is around 400 to 500. The visitors are mainly Finns but they have had some international visitors also, for example, from other Scandinavian countries, Poland, Spain, Russia, Taiwan, USA and from many others.

Reijo is very active in networking, at the moment he is involved at least in eight different networks. In many of these groups that he is involved in, the goal is to enhance people's knowledge of different farm tourism resorts.

II THEORETICAL STUDY

2. CUSTOMER

2.1 Customer concept from the customer satisfaction leadership's point of view

From the customer satisfaction leadership's point of view a customer is a person who has been in contact with the company's services, either directly or indirectly. Another possibility is that the person has actually bought the company's products.

The customer satisfaction leadership's customer concept differs from the traditional customer concept. In the traditional concept becoming a customer requires that you buy something and this way a customer relationship is established.

In customer satisfaction leadership customer does not necessarily have to buy anything or even be directly and personally in contact with the company. A customer just needs to be somehow in contact with the company. This concept is closer to the potential customer's concept.

In customer satisfaction leadership a concept called contact surface is issued. This contact surface relates a certain company to the customer. This contact surface includes all the following contacts:

1. Personnel contacts (e.g. customer service personnel)
2. Product contacts (e.g. products durability)
3. Support system contacts (e.g. invoicing)
4. Ambience contacts (e.g. cleanliness)

(Rope Timo, Pöllänen Jouni. 1994, 27-28)

3. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The goal for every company should be to make its customers satisfied. Satisfied customers will come again and might stay as customers for a longer period of time.

It is important for the company to actually care and appreciate the customer. It is clear that if the company can make the customer satisfied the customer will come back again and the customers might also tell to some of their friends about the good service they got. So through satisfied customers it is possible to save in marketing expenses.

I have also worked in the service profession and have noticed that it is very important to keep the customers happy. Today's customers will quite easily comment if they are not satisfied. As all of us know it is much nicer to deal with a satisfied person than with dissatisfied one.

3.1 Factors affecting customer satisfaction

The counterparts of satisfaction are always expectations and experiences. Level of expectations level will create a basis and comparison base for experiences. For example, if you have two hotels, one a five star hotel and the other just a two star hotel, of course your expectations for the five star hotel are much higher than for the other one. If the service level in both is equal, when a customer has high expectations like with the five star hotel he might feel disappointed and with the two star hotel with which the customer had lower expectations he would be positively surprised. In customer satisfaction leadership when creating satisfaction it is important that you can affect both expectations and experiences. Still the expectations are always a starting point when building action. (Rope Timo, Pöllänen Jouni. 1994, 29)

3.1.1 Expectations

When talking about the relationship between expectations and experiences, expectations are usually seen as one whole field. In reality there are several kinds of expectations and one of the most functional classifications is tripartition of expectations:

1. Ideal expectations
2. Pre-expectations
3. Minimum expectations

Ideal expectations tell about person's own values and hopes for the action that he/she expects from a company or from a product. Ideal expectations, for example, of a shop's services can be included:

- Cheap prices
- Friendly personal service
- Perfect assortments and selection
- High quality products
- Close location

When looking at ideal expectations it is important to see that different persons have different expectations. Even persons in different segments differ from each other in relation to ideal expectations. It is impossible for companies to combine all the above mentioned ideal expectations features. This is why the company has to choose just some of these features, the ones that are best for the company and then the company should fulfil these expectations as well as possible.

Pre-expectations mean the level of expectations the person has on a certain company and/or its product and its different features. Pre-expectations mean quite the same

thing as the company or product image. This way the customer satisfaction leadership is connected to mental image marketing. There are several factors affecting pre-expectations, such as experiences, mouth-to-mouth communication, branch, business idea, basic elements of marketing, marketing communication and publicity. All these factors are connected to each other, either directly or indirectly.

Minimum expectations describe the minimum level that customer has set for him/herself, what he/she requires from the company or from the product. There are four different factors affecting the minimum expectations. These are:

1. Situational factors (e.g. buying situation, surrounding situation)
2. Customer's background factors (e.g. values, income level, personality)
3. Branch factors (e.g. competition situation)
4. Company factors (e.g. business idea, marketing)

And again all these factors influence on each other.

(Rope Timo, Pöllänen Jouni. 1994, 29-38)

When working in a service profession a customer servant needs to be a good judge of character. All customers can not be served the same way. Behaviour needs to be changed even a little with every customer. Having a good customer servant is a huge bonus for a company. Through a good customer servant the company can win many competition situations.

3.1.2 Experiences

Expectations are proportioned to experiences and this creates reaction in the scale of satisfied-dissatisfied. This satisfaction scale is divided in three basic categories:

(Rope Timo, Pöllänen Jouni. 1994, 38)

1. Under expectation situation = positive experience

2. Balance situation = match to the expectations

3. Over expectation situation = negative experience

In the under expectation situation the service or the product is experienced in a positive way, but when once positively surprised the level of expectations towards the company rises. In this positive surprise case the person is often eager to tell his/her friends about a good service or a good product. If the company keeps up the good service and/or good products, there is a chance that a new customer relationship is born. When the customer gets a negative experience and the company's image lowers, it is more possible that the customer relationship will break. Disappointed customers are bad advertisement for the company because they tend to tell their friends and family about the negative experience. (Rope Timo, Pöllänen Jouni. 1994, 39)

3.2. Satisfaction levels

The customer satisfaction levels can be divided into different categories according to how strongly and to which direction the customers have reacted.

The first three categories are: negatively surprised, expectations fulfilled and the last one is positively surprised. The negatively surprised category can be further divided into two subcategories: great disappointments and mild disappointments. Also the positively surprised category can be divided in the same way into two subcategories: mild positive surprises and great positive surprises.

1. Greatly disappointed customers

These customers usually complain right away, they might break the customer relationship and spread the negative word about the company. The customer relationship breakage and the negative word of mouth occurs most likely if the company does not take action when the customer complains. The complaint situation should be seen as an opportunity to fix the negative disappointment and this way to keep the customer.

2. Mildly disappointed customers

This customer type does not react straight away; instead the next time they go shopping they choose an other product. If asked about this negatively surprised company, these customers are also ready to recommend using another company. With these customers it is very important that the company has a system for collecting customer feedback. If the company does not have a feedback system they might lose a lot of customers.

3. Experience according to expectations

Depending on the customer's expectations level consequences are slightly different. In high expectations case the customer relationship is strengthened because the customer had very high expectations and the company could fulfil these high expectations. In average expectations situation, even though the company performs according to customer's expectations it does not necessarily improve or weaken the customer relationship. In this situation it is possible for the competitor to make a better offer for the customer and this way "steal" the customer. But without the competitor's offer there is every chance to continue the customer relationship with these existing customers. In low expectations situation, when the expectations are fulfilled, you can't really describe the customer as satisfied; the customer just found out that the company answered his/her low expectations. Without any good alternatives the customer relationship can continue if the relationship is based on personal acquaintance. In case a better competitor occurs and is active the customer may start to use this competitor's services.

4. Mildly positively surprised

These customers do not usually give feedback on their positive experiences. But one way to experience their satisfaction is that they stay customers and they are ready to recommend this company or product to their friends. This mildly positively surprised group is the most committed customer group. The customer relationship keeps on go-

ing if the company keeps surprising the customers in the future as well. The surprises do not have to be very big ones: just a small positive surprise is enough.

5. Greatly positively surprised customers

Customers feel greatly surprised when:

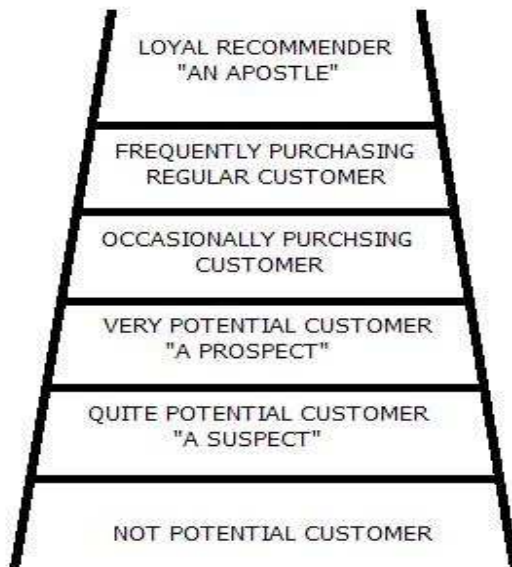
- They have a very low expectation level and the company performs in an exemplary way.
- Contact situation is exceptional
- Some part of company's actions or the whole process worked in such a fine level that the customer is not used to.

Such strongly positively surprises do not happen that often, but when they do happen the customer will on his own thank for the treatment he got. The customer is very likely to also spread positive word-of-mouth. (Rope Timo, Pöllänen Jouni. 1994, 40-43)

3.3 Customer loyalty

Quality, customer service and marketing are quite often treated as separate and as functions that do not have anything to do with each other. In customer relationship marketing though, all these functions are connected to each other in order to make the customer satisfied and committed to the customer relationship. This requires co-operation between the persons who make the marketing decisions and who carry out these decisions. In customer relationship the most important goals are customer satisfaction and loyalty and also profitable long-term relationships.

Customer loyalty ladder shows the different stages through which a potential customer becomes an active recommender. All the customers are not equally potential. The company can use research studies and its own experience when choosing its target marketing groups. Development of a customer relationship begins from the very first contact, it is important that the first contact succeeds; otherwise the customer might never come again.



Picture 1. Customer loyalty ladder (Lahtinen Jukka, Isoviita Antti, 2004, 11)

When trying to create customer satisfaction, the two most important things are caring for the customer and trust. A customer will appreciate the fact that the company won't leave him/her to cope alone with the problems that were caused by the company's actions. Customer satisfaction is still only an intermediate stopping point on the way to customer loyalty. Only satisfied enough customer will become a loyal customer.

Customer relationships can be divided into three categories according to how firm they are. The first level customer relationships the bond is only financial: the most important means of competition are cheap prices and mass marketing. In this case there is not really customer loyalty. In the second level the customer loyalty, bonds are social. Through personal contacts with the customer, a strong emotional bond, a trust is created. But still the price is not an insignificant factor: in this case the customer normally uses the same company but in case she/he sees a much cheaper offer

somewhere else the customer will go there. In the third level of customer relationships the bonds are structural. The company is able to offer such individual and unique service that it is hard to replace it with other companies' services. To get loyal customers it is important to get to the second or to the third level of customer satisfaction. Customer loyalty can be defined as customer's deep commitment to buying products or services they intensely want on a continuous basis. A loyal customer intensely wants to buy a certain product or service and does not qualify any other options, no matter however cheap they are. (Lahtinen Jukka, Isoviita Antti, 2004, 11-13)

3.4 Dissatisfied customers

There are always customers who are not satisfied. Dissatisfaction can be caused by several factors, but whatever the reason it is always equally important to solve the cause of dissatisfaction. If the cause is not solved properly, the company might be losing its customers.

There are some basic rules in marketing and here are some of them. The first rule is the 3/11 rule. This means that when a customer receives good service he/she is going to tell about it to three of his/her friends. But if the customer becomes disappointed he/she will tell about this to eleven persons. The difference between these two figures is huge. The disappointed customer is really bad advertisement for the company and this is the reason why problem situations should be handled as well as possible.

Another rule is the 26/27 rule. This means that out of 27 dissatisfied customers 26 will not complain about the bad treatment they got, instead these customers consider changing the shopping place next time. When dealing with this type of customers it is crucial that the company has a feedback system and this way the company can get information from these customers about what went wrong in the customer service situation. After getting the feedback the company can start fixing the problem and hopefully keep the customers in the future as well.

This brings us to the next rule, the 1-10-27 rule. If the company once loses a customer, getting this customer to come back is very difficult. According to a Finnish survey getting back a once lost customer is even 27 times more expensive than maintaining a regular customer relationship. Getting new customers is up to ten times more expensive than selling to a regular customer.

All these rules show that it is very important for the company to keep the customers happy. If the company does not do this it might be very costly, or even fatal, for the company. (Lahtinen Jukka, Isoviita Antti, 2004, 2-3)

4. CUSTOMER SERVICE

4.1. What is good customer service?

Good customer service is seen as a desirable value. Good customer service is created together with the customer in a service situation. Customer service is something that is done for the customer. (Rissanen, 2005, 17)

4.2. The main features of customer service

There are at least five features that describe customer service. These are:

1. Intangibility

Service is not something you can store, service happens with the customer each time and each time it can be a bit different. You can't return service like you can return tangible products. Pricing a service can be difficult or maybe even impossible.

2. Coexistence

Producing a service often happens in an interactive process where both the user and the service producer are in interaction. This interactive process might take just few seconds or it might last decades.

3. New products and new distribution channels

Service can happen through many channels, for example, via phone or on the internet.

4. Heterogeneity and unique variation

Because service is intangible, unique and passing, product responsibility or consumer protection is hard to apply on a service. Monitoring quality and pricing is difficult.

5. Creativity

Each service situation is unique and it gives the service provider space for being creative. (Rissanen, 2005, 20-21)

4.3. Components of a good service

Good service consists of four different components. These are: service producing, service package, service quality and service culture.

4.3.1 Service producing

Service producing includes the served customer, service surroundings, the contact personnel and other customers. The customer must be served as an individual since the customer is judging the service during the whole service process. The service producer must keep in mind the 3/11 –rule, the customer can be a recommender. The service surroundings should be cosy and neat. Carefully planned surroundings can create an atmosphere where the customer is more likely to buy. The contact personnel is probably the most important feature that affects the customer. The personnel should have high professional skills, be willing to serve and have empathy. Other customers can tell about their experiences to other potential customers and this has a huge impact on people.

4.3.2 Service package

Service packages are service entiretys formed of several services. These service entiretys satisfy the customer needs. Service entiretys are gathered around a core service. Around this core service you build a group of additional services that interest customers and benefits them. A core service requires basic professional ability and producing additional services requires tailored service ability.

4.3.3 Service quality

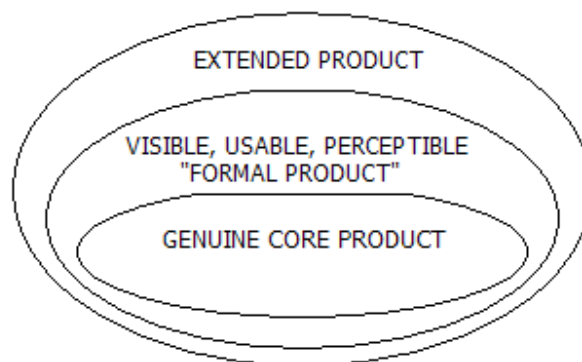
Pre-expectations, service experience and the company image affect the experienced service quality. When a customer is forming his/her opinion about the service quality they compare the expectations, the service they got and the company image. All of these three aspects: expectations, received service and company image are connected to each other. The qualities of interaction relationships, the quality of the outcome or result and service surroundings all affect the experienced service quality.

4.3.4 Service culture

Service culture means the service community's atmosphere that reflects the values of the community. It is also silent agreement what's allowed, forbidden and hoped. Shortly said service culture means customer orientation. (Lahtinen, Isoviita, 1994, 17-22)

4.4 The structure of a service product

The following picture describes the structure of a service product.



Picture 2. The structure of a service product (Rissanen, 2005, 21)

Service consists of the core product and of the additional services, called formal products and extended products. Service package is gathered around one core service or product. The core product responses to a question that what does the service com-

munity actually do. An Air line flies people from one place to another, for instance. (Lahtinen, Isoviita, 1994, 13)

Core advantage or benefit is the reason why customer has come into the market, to find a solution to a problem. The customer is looking for a product, service or a combination of those two that could help to solve a problem. (Rissanen, 2005, 21)

A customer does not become interested in the core product until there are additional services gathered around it. Sometimes it is almost impossible to use just the core product without using the additional services at the same time. For example, you can't pay your bills at a bank without paying the service fee. However, quite often the additional services are optional you can pay for those if you want to. The service packages are created of the core product, formal product and the extended product. (Lahtinen, Isoviita, 1994, 13)

The middle section, the formal product, consists of the visible part. When services are concerned, brand, quality and price, for example belong to this section. Modern marketing relies quite a lot on this section. However, also the extended product section has a big impact on a modern marketing. For example, warranty and product security belong to this section. (Rissanen, 2005, 22)

5. CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MARKETING'S COMPETITION MEANS

In customer oriented marketing the main tasks are finding out the demand, creating demand, satisfying the demand and controlling the demand. When you want to influence the satisfaction of demand or influence the demand you can use these means of marketing competition. These means are the entirety that you use to approach the outside interest groups. Of the possible competition means the company builds up a planned combination which is called the marketing mix. (Bergström, Leppänen, 2001, 122)

Marketing mix is built of basic competition means, these are selected and helping competition means. These basic competition means are product, price and availability. Selected competition means are the sectors of marketing communication. To the competition means you can also connect the staff, organizing the material deliveries and relationships to different interest groups. These can be called helping competition means. To the improve staff's know-how, relationships and material deliveries, internal marketing is the solution. Marketing research has an important role in designing and monitoring the functionality of the competition means. (Bergström, Leppänen, 2001, 122)

Companies tend to use these marketing's competition means in very different ways, depending on e.g. a branch and product, but the usage of these means is supposed to create long-lasting and functioning customer relationships. (Bergström, Leppänen, 2001, 122)

It is important that the competition means function as well as possible and form a functioning entirety. The product or service itself is, of course, one of the most important factors in making the company succeed. At Farm Tourism Ilomäki they have really managed to create a good combination that is working well. Their strong points are absolutely the staff and the great service combined with supporting means.

5.1 Customer service

Customer service is a skill that almost everyone can learn. The most important thing is to know how people want themselves to be treated. Customers in a service situation want to be treated as individuals whose needs, ideas, feelings and person is respected. A good customer servant has the humility to listen to the customer and take the customer seriously.

Service chain is the key concept. A customer expects that all the parts in the service chain work properly and if there are any failures at some point, the customer also expects that this problem is corrected in a proper way. Customers will see if the company makes just “cosmetic” improvements and this might make the situation even worse for the company. It is important to keep the service chain at the previous good level and improve the poorer points in the service chain.

Customer service is one of the most important competition means in marketing. Good service is very important, especially for smaller companies which simply can't compete with price.

Services can be classified in many ways. Some services are standard services while others special services. Services can also be classified according to the usage as consumer and production services. Division to personal and non-personal services is based on the fact that whether personal contact is needed when producing a service.

In service companies there usually is not have a separate marketing function, instead all the functions themselves are marketing. The whole service company's staff should participate in marketing. A good service includes four elements: service atmosphere, service package, production of services and the quality of service.

Service atmosphere means the things the customer feels, sees and senses in a service community. A customer can very easily sense from the company's staff how committed they really are to solving customer problems. Service package is an entirety formed of the company's several marketed services. Service package is formed

around the core service. Producing core service is taking care of the company's basic assignment and producing supplementary services is tailored special knowledge. With this knowledge you compete with others and this is often the reason the customers become interested in the core service. Producing a service is a chain of events. Service is formed when a customer is in contact with other factors of the service production process. These other factors are the customer, service surroundings, service staff and other customers. All these factors interact with each other. The level of service quality is a result of service atmosphere, service packages and service production process.

The actual service encounter with the customer can be divided into four different sections: entering the service, sales discussion, closing up the service and the after care of the customer relationship. All these stages should be managed well each time or otherwise the customer will possibly go to a competing company.

(Lahtinen Jukka, Isoviita Antti, 2004, 38-57)

5.2 Staff

In customer relationship marketing, loyal customers and good staff are the most important resources for the company. In the hiring stage it is very important to hire the right persons; if you make a mistake at this point it is very hard to correct it afterwards. The hired employees should be service minded and interested in customer service.

Internal marketing is a form of leadership, where the head of the department's duty is to create an atmosphere where people are motivated to work for as good results as possible. People tend to get motivated when they feel that the work they are doing is appreciated and people whose work is appreciated tend to keep making better results as well. In this leading approach it is important to create good and positive working atmosphere and encouraging work tasks.

In internal leadership atmosphere the whole staff should be educated to serve customers, not just the members of the staff who are physically in contact with the customers. Every single person's service skills are important in the eyes of the customers. If a person who calls a company to book a time for some service, receives negative service already at the booking stage, the person might cancel the appointment right away and go elsewhere.

The most important factor of the internal marketing success is the leaders' and staff's ability to take criticism. Another success factor is the company leaders' example. Leaders should show the staff that all that is done is done in an excellent way. The leaders' should also interfere immediately if they see a bad work result. If they do not, in the customers' eyes this seems as an indifference. (Lahtinen Jukka, Isoviita Antti, 2004, 65-68)

5.3 Relationship networks

Relationship networks are necessary for the company. Relationship marketing is a way to take care your relations with all the important interest groups and partners in cooperation.

There are five target groups in relationship marketing. These five are: competitors, recommenders and influencers, suppliers, potential employees and customers.

1. Competitors

It is important to be in contact with your competitors, this way together you can accomplish changes in your business branch, like changing legislation. You can even purchase some equipment together and by doing so way save money. For example, in farm tourism business, if all your cottages and other premises are full, you can always guide the people to your competitor's premises and hope that your competitor will some day do the same favour to you, as they often do, especially in small villages.

2. Recommender and influencers

These are the best marketers for the company because people tend to believe these kinds of people's word more than some advertisement they see in a magazine or on television. To market efficiently you often need all kinds of licenses and that is why it is important to have good relations to big influencers. When taking care of relationships, the company should always be as truthful as possible; otherwise any dishonesty might turn against you at some point.

3. Suppliers

Suppliers are producers, importers and wholesalers. You often need services from these groups so it is important to create good relationships that benefit both parties. When you manage to create a good relationship you get trustworthy service, short delivery times, cheaper prices and flexible deliveries. Working relationships benefit your actual customers as well; they will appreciate it if they get promised services on time instead of excuses.

4. Potential employees

It is important for the company to get in contact with possible new employees by keeping in contact with schools from the branch they operate in, arranging recruiting events or participating in different fairs where students are choosing occupations. Student visits are also one important way to find new skilful employees. In the future there is likely to be competition for new good employees, that is why the company should start early its search for new talents.

5. Customers

Customers form the most important factor in the relationship network and this is the reason why the marketing community should be very interested in customers. It is important to know how customers feel about your company, your competitor's company and what they might want to improve. (Lahtinen Jukka, Isoviita Antti, 2004, 72-74)

5.4 The 4P model

5.4.1 Product decisions

Product is the most important element of the company's marketing mix, because other competition means solutions are build around the product. Product means a marketable commodity. Product is understood as an entirety that has different layers. Layers include the core product, helping parts and image product. This layer aspect concerns both products and services. Services can be divided to core services, extra and supporting services. Quality means all the factors that customers appreciate in a product. (Bergström Seija, Leppänen Arja, 2001, 122)

Assortment and selection decisions are decisions concerning selecting certain products and selecting the amount. These decisions have to be thought in order to accomplish a reasonable and functional entirety. Assortment means all the marketed products and selections means products inside one product group. Assortment can sometimes be called the width of the product mix and selection can be called the depth of the product mix. In a jewellery store assortment means all the company's marketed products all together, selections means, for example, jewellery for women, different earrings, rings and bracelets. (Bergström Seija, Leppänen Arja, 2001, 160)

In Farm Tourism Ilomäki the clear core service is providing accommodation. Around this they have created many other additional or supporting services. I think they have many great ideas to make people enjoy their stay even more. For example, Ilomäki offers canoeing trips to the near by lake to see birds from the bird watch tower. For children there are several animals to pet and there is even a chance for horseback riding for both children and adults. There is also a chance to go hunting or fishing, the company has a boat for their customers at a nearby lake. If the customers want they can also take part in the farm work. In addition to all these there is a chance to use bikes, skis and snowshoes. When the customers come to Ilomäki they can just call and they will have a warm sauna waiting for them when they get there.

5.4.2 Price decisions

In addition to product, price is also very important means of competition for the company. When pricing a product or service many different aspects should be considered. Traditionally the base for pricing has been expenses but now pricing is moving towards market pricing, where the bases for pricing are demand and competition situation. (Bergström Seija, Leppänen Arja, 2001, 164)

Price is described as an indicator of the product's value and also as creator of the product's value. Price creates a certain quality image to the customers. Price is also a factor that affects competition and cost-effectiveness. If the price is too low or high it might slow sales. The higher the price the better the profit but the price is too high a loss will be made. The price should also be correctly set for the target group. (Bergström Seija, Leppänen Arja, 2001, 164)

There are several factors affecting pricing. First factor is the market; this is the base for pricing. Competition and the relationship between supply and demand will affect the price level. Government is still a big factor affecting prices through taxes, fees and laws. The company's goal has a big influence on pricing: how big a market share a company wants to have or how high sales and profitability goals it has. When thinking about pricing you should think about the product itself, is it a core product or an entirety with all sorts of additional services. Then the last factor affecting pricing decisions is expenses. The amount of expenses form the lowest limit for the price, as expenses must be covered. (Bergström Seija, Leppänen Arja, 2001, 165-166)

Competing with price should not be the only means of competition that is used. Often this is not even possible. Especially for smaller companies, it is not possible to compete with price that much, instead they often use other means as they should. Price of the product is something that should be very carefully considered and analyzed.

In Ilomäki pricing is done well; prices are set so that many kind of people can afford to pay that amount, even big families with several children. In pricing they have had to take into consideration the fact that in Southern Ostrobothnia there are quite many farm tourism locations. And even in this same village there are at least four other providers of farm tourism services

When carrying out a customer satisfaction surveys it is always important to ask the customers about the price level and how they feel about it. This way it can be understood if any changes in the pricing are necessary. If the customers feel the price is too high they might go elsewhere.

5.4.3 Availability (placing)

Placing means the availability of the product or service. The basic job for availability is to enable to satisfy customers' needs. Availability or placing is one of the three basic marketing means the company has; the others are as already mentioned are product and price. The definition for availability is: through availability it is made sure that the product is available for the customers, so that purchasing is easy and that the goals set for the company's business and marketing are fulfilled. There are three different aspects in availability: (Bergström Seija, Leppänen Arja, 2001, 182-183)

- Marketing channel
- Physical distribution
- Internal and external availability

Marketing channel means a chain of different companies, through which the product is sold to the market. This marketing channel concept suits both products and services. A marketing channel can be just an information channel, through which a customer can find information on a service or a product.

Internal marketing basically means that the premises and the service inside the company should be as enjoyable to the customers as possible. It can also be defined as the

easiness of finding and getting the wanted product or reaching the right person quickly. Internal marketing concept also includes a right number of skilful personnel, even clear documents, like receipts are included in this concept. Customers should be served in a right order. Pleasantness of the visit affects internal marketing as well. For example, for families with children it is important that the company has a playing area for children and a child-care room. Investing in internal marketing does not demand big investments, just a new way of thinking. (Bergström Seija, Leppänen Arja, 2001, 183- 192)

In Ilomäki they have succeeded well in internal marketing. The premises are decorated as real farm houses often are, and people have their own privacy. But still the company's employees are always just one phone call or a visit away if their services are needed. For families with children, there is lot to do. In all living quarters there are plenty of toys and games to play with.

External availability depends on the company's location. It is important to tell the customers where the company is located or how else you can get in contact with the company. For newly established companies to recently moved companies and difficulty located companies it is crucial to inform customers of the location. To get in contact with the company should be easy; it is good to have several alternative ways to contact the company. Offering parking lots for people who use cars to reach the company is important. As important it is to arrange easy access to handicapped people as well. (Bergström Seija, Leppänen Arja, 2001, 190-191)

Opening hours are an important element in external availability. The company should be open when the customers need the services but there are legal restrictions concerning opening hours. (Bergström Seija, Leppänen Arja, 2001, 191)

The location for this company as for many other farm tourism places was obvious. Even though the location is a bit remote, it is easy to find. For these types of companies it is typical that people come to these places to get some peace and quiet and to

relax, that is why the remote location is not a problem, quite the opposite, it is a benefit.

Again, I would say that also this form of availability is well-arranged. The company is located almost in the middle of nowhere, but still it is very easy to find. They have placed two signs by the road that can be easily seen from a distance. The map of the location can be found from the company's webpage and distances to most important places can be found from the web page as well or from the advertisements. To get in contact with the company has been made easy as well: you can either call or send email through their web pages. Of course, when we are talking about a farm tourism resort, parking is not an issue, there is plenty of space. Few years back the company has also built such accommodation that is especially designed for people with wheel chair. There are not any special opening hours; you can basically call or come in any time.

5.4.4 Marketing communication (promotion)

Advertisement, sales promotion, public relations and personal selling are traditionally regarded as means of marketing communication. This division is, however, a bit outdated. It does not take into consideration the fact that services are increasing all the time and the meaning of the service is more and more important. According to relationship marketing, marketing communication is divided into sales support and interaction marketing according to how clearly the goal is a purchase decision. (Lahtinen Jukka, Isoviita Antti, 1998, 211)

Marketing communication makes a company and its product or service visible. Different parts of marketing communication. I.e. advertisement, sales, sales promotion and information services and public relations are called mediating competition means. This is because through the aim is to make the company well-known, create good company image, give information and try to influence demand. (Bergström Seija, Leppänen Arja, 2001, 210)

6. THEORETICAL FRAME

The aim of this chapter is to see through the theories connected to the research. The theoretical study is divided into four different chapters: customer, customer satisfaction, customer service and customer relationship marketing competition means.

In chapter two the concept of customer is briefly defined from the point of view of customer satisfaction leadership. In the chapter it is discussed, what the difference between the traditional customer concept and the customer concept from the customer satisfaction leadership's point of view is.

In the customer satisfaction chapter the point was to find out what makes the customers feel satisfied so the factors affecting customer satisfaction are introduced. Then the customer satisfaction levels are introduced, those can be divided into different categories. Customer loyalty is examined and the reasons that make customers stay loyal are considered. At the end of this chapter there is a section on dissatisfied customers, in which the reasons that make people feel dissatisfied with something and how the company should react to dissatisfied customers and what you can learn from these customers are all examined.

In the last chapter the competition means for customer relationship marketing are examined. It is important for a company to understand what different means they have in the competition situation, how they can make themselves stand out of the competitors. The impact of customer service staff, relationship networks and the 4P model and the parts of that are all examined. These means are examined to point out how different things and even small choices can affect customer satisfaction.

The goal of the theoretical part is to clarify how customer satisfaction is created, what means there are to achieve it and what customer satisfaction can mean to a company. In customer service it is important to keep monitoring and measuring customer satisfaction continuously in order to see how the business is doing or what could be improved and how.

III EMPIRICAL STUDY

After the theoretical study it is time to focus on the empirical study and the main focus is on the theoretical of a marketing research and the customer satisfaction survey that was carried out for Farm Tourism Ilomäki. The chapter begins by introducing how marketing research is carried out in general. After this it is time to examine the actual customer satisfaction survey.

In the empirical study how the customer satisfaction survey was done is introduced and after that the used questions and the background of the questions are explained in detail. The results of the survey are introduced question by question, the results are analyzed and conclusions are made. In the end connections to the theoretical study are made and reliability and validity are described. Finally further research suggestions are made.

7. MARKETING RESEARCH

In this chapter the stages of a marketing research are introduced. Carefully done marketing research is the key to a successful research. Different research methods will be gone through together with sampling. The idea of this chapter is to introduce the way market research is done.

7.1 Meaning of a marketing research

In marketing research the needed information is collected and analyzed in order to locate and solve marketing problems. Marketing researches give company leaders information for decision making. With the acquired information the leaders aim to avoid mistakes and also decrease the company risks.

In a marketing research, on one hand, very general basic information is acquired and, on the other hand, also very detailed information is needed for marketing fine-tuning. In marketing research you start from the bottom by getting sales opportunities and

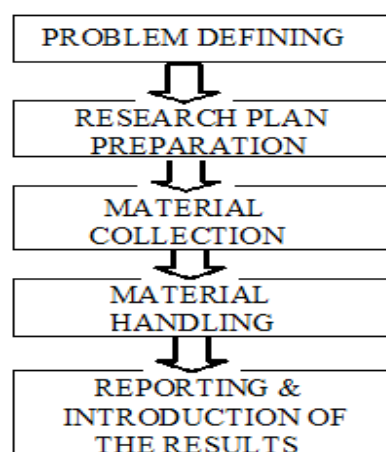
basic knowledge of the competition situation. After that the target group is analyzed and to reach this target group, distribution channels and advertising means are used. After this it is possible to start to analyze the factors affecting customer satisfaction, company image and product image. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 10-16)

According to Malhotra and Birks marketing research is the systematic and objective identification, collection, analysis and dissemination of information for improving decision-making related to the identification and solution of the problems and opportunities in marketing. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 7)

One customer appreciates something else than the other. It is important to find out what the customers find the most important element and invest on that. It is important to research the factors customers appreciate and want instead of guessing. Marketing research is the right tool for this, as with its help it is possible to locate the things that matter to customer.

7.2 Stages of the research

Marketing research consists of five different stages. From the picture below the different stages can be seen.



Picture 3. Stages of Marketing Research (Lotti Leila, 1998, 27)

The chart of different stages of marketing research is a useful tool for starting to carry out a marketing research. By using that the needs can be considered and at the end the researcher can check if the research has really covered all the five stages.

7.2.1 Problem defining

Before you can even start your marketing research the problem needs to be defined and the needed information and its relevance must be considered. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 28-29)

Problem defining is the most important step of any marketing research. Only when the marketing research problem is clearly defined the research can be started. The marketing research problem should be so clearly stated that it cannot be misunderstood. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 32)

The research problem should not be defined too narrowly or too widely as is a common mistake in marketing researches. If the problem is defined too widely, there is too much information for creating proper picture. And if the problem is defined too narrowly, there might not be all the information needed to make a good marketing study. Since this is the most important part of the process, time should be taken to do this, so that problems are not faced later on. (Lotti Leila, 1998)

7.2.2 Research plan preparation

In a research plan the methods which will be used – are defined to get the needed information in order to solve the problem. You will also decide what kind of information you want to use. At this stage the expenses and the needed time to carry out the research are estimated. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 29)

In a planning stage it is decided how to proceed with the research, secondary data can be used, which means that this data is already collected for some purpose other than the problem at hand. The other option is to use the primary data, which means the data is originated by a researcher for a specific purpose this is also called as a survey

research. Obtaining primary data can be time consuming and also expensive. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 17)

Primary data can be either quantitative or qualitative in nature. Qualitative research tends to be exploratory; it is intended to provide insight and understanding. The quantitative tends to be descriptive, it typically applies some form of statistical analysis. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 156)

In a sample plan the basic group that the research is focused on is defined. The used sample method and the size of the sample are described. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 106)

When making a research plan the processing of the material, with what method the material will be examined, for example by using statistics should be considered. The results should be shown so that those are understandable to everyone; the results should be shown in numbers or graphically. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 29-30)

7.2.3 Material collection

In material collection there usually are two options, either the data can be collected by yourself or some company can be hired to do it for you. These companies are specialized in marketing research and know what they are doing. Whatever way chosen it always involves some amount of field work. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000,)

What method of research is chosen affects the following procedures. In a typical interview research an interview form is created, the sampling method is decided together with the size of the sample group. After the field work is done the information is gathered together and report is made. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 31)

Before making an interview research it is important to test the interview form, so that the questions are clearly understood, this way the right kind of information is gained.

7.2.4 Material handling

In a quantitative research after the material collection the questionnaires are checked for mistakes. If possible the defective forms are returned to the respondent for correction. If it is not possible to return the form to the field anymore the defective forms may be classified as missing values or unsatisfactory responses if the forms suffer big defects they can be completely rejected. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000)

After the forms have been inspected and classified it is time to code the data and to save it. The data is then gathered and put into statistical form. The data can be presented in a numerical or in a graphical form. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 123, 136)

7.2.5 Reporting & Introduction of the results

A research report includes a description of the fulfilment of the research and also the summary of the research results. There are certain things that are usually mentioned about the fulfilment of the research; time of the research, who did the research and for whom, research method, something about the sampling and about the field work. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 136)

A research report should be in a written form. The main function for the report is to tell the results to the ordering party. The report should include conclusions and suggestions for future actions. The report should be easily readable; with pictures of charts you can illustrate the text a lot. The research form or questionnaire is also attached to the report. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 136-140)

The research results should be presented in such a form that those results can easily be used in decision making. Also when presenting the results orally, it is wise to use tables, figures and graphics to make the presentation more clear. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 662)

7.3 Research method

When doing a marketing research there are two options, either existing data that was collected by someone else can be used, This is called secondary research. Another option is that you can collect your own data. This method is called primary research or as survey research. A research can also be a combination of these two. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 29)

7.3.1 Secondary research

Secondary data means that this data has already been collected for some purpose other than the problem at hand. Secondary data can be gathered quickly and inexpensively. Since secondary data has been collected for some purpose other than the problem at hand this may cause some problems. The usefulness of the data for the current problem may be limited in many ways, including relevance and accuracy. The information can be old and include several mistakes. All these disadvantages should be carefully considered and evaluated before using the secondary data. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 99)

Secondary data can be divided into two categories; internal data and external data. Internal data means data available within the organisation for which the research is being conducted. When starting to find secondary data, internal data should be the starting point. External data means data that comes from outside the organisation. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 103-106)

7.3.2 Primary data

Primary data is originated by a researcher for the specific problem at hand. There are several steps at collecting primary data. Collecting primary data may be time consuming and expensive. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 42)

In primary data the research method is descriptive and explanatory. In a descriptive survey you acquire the information in a systematic way. Through this you get information, for example, on buying behaviour, target groups or opinions. This is a very

common research method. In a descriptive research you analyze two or more factors and their dependency on each other. This is, for example, the way to get information on some advertising campaign's effect on sales. This method is not used so often. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 29)

Primary research methods are, for instance, an envelope survey, personal interview or group interview. The selection of the appropriate research method depends on the research problem and what kind of information is needed. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 42-43) Primary data may be further divided into qualitative and quantitative research. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000,)

7.4 Quantitative and qualitative research

As explained earlier, primary data is collected or created by the researcher for the certain research. Primary data can be quantitative or qualitative in nature. Quantitative method is descriptive and conclusive. It is usually presented in some statistical form. Qualitative method is exploratory and this method is intended to provide insight and understanding. In the following sections both of the methods are discussed.

7.4.1 Quantitative research

Quantitative research is based on an amount. Quantitative research replies to questions, how many, how much, how often and how important something is. It is based on exact sampling and the results are presented as percentages, in euros, in tons and so on. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 42)

Personal interview is the most traditional and also still the most popular quantitative research method. With different interview researches the goal is to find out consumers' buying behaviour, magazine reading, and opinions on products or on companies and so on. When choosing a research method the most important criteria are of course the research problem, budget and also the time available for the research. In the following different types of interviews are introduced. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 43)

Phone interview

As mentioned earlier, personal interview is the most traditional and also still the most popular quantitative research method. Personal interview can be done by phone. Phone interviews can be divided into traditional phone interviews and computer-assisted telephone interviews. Traditional telephone interview the interviewer basically has paper and pen to write down the answers. Another option is to record the answers. These interviews tend to be short in duration. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 211-212)

In computer-assisted telephone interview the interviewer has a computer and a telephone headset. The computer dials the phone number on command. When the interviewer gets contact the questions are read from the screen. Computer also records the answers on a hard drive and analyzes the answers immediately. The main advantage of this technique is the speed. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 211-212)

Mail interview

Interview can also be a mail interview, where customer has some more time to answer the questions. Mail interview can be divided into three sections; traditional mail survey, electronic mail survey and mail panel.

In traditional mail interview the questionnaire with cover letter and return envelope are sent to pre-selected potential respondents. Before data collection can begin the initial task is to obtain a valid mailing list. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 216)

Thanks to the internet electronic mail surveys are becoming more and more popular and important. Electrical mail survey is very fast and cost-effective research method. This method has several advantages and just a few disadvantages. The advantages are speed, low cost, quality of response and contacting certain target groups. One of the disadvantages used to be access to the web, but nowadays internet connections are increasing number so fast that this won't be a problem for long. Sampling frames are

mentioned as another problem; there is no public email lists available as there are of phone numbers. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 217)

Mail panel consists of large and nationally representative sample of households that have agreed to participate in periodical mail questionnaires, product tests and telephone surveys. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 218)

Informed interview

There is still one form of interview; informed interview. This places between personal or phone interview and mail interview. With this method the interviewer either delivers the questionnaire or picks it up. Either way it is done the interviewer gets a contact to the interviewee and at this point the interviewer can advice or check the form filling and also ask few questions. Informed interview is very flexible method and quite inexpensive as well. The response rate is usually as high as 65-90%, this is better than in normal mail interview. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 51- 52)

7.4.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is the way to understand consumers' behaviour. This method is used when new and unknown markets are investigated and when we want to know what's happening in the market in general how consumers are behaving and why they are behaving the way they do. The most important qualitative research methods in Finland are group discussions and depth interviews. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 64)

Group discussion

Group discussions usually last 1-2 hours and people are exchanging experiences, emotions and opinions. The discussion is monitored a researcher who's also guiding the discussion. The researcher observes the participants' facial expressions, gestures and positions. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 65)

There are several advantages in group discussions. One of them is that people talk so called "normal" language that they use in everyday life, differences between consum-

ers are emphasized in these discussions and a wide picture of a behavior is seen in a short time. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 65)

There are also several disadvantages. If the time is too short the discussion can be quite superficial. If there is even one very strong person in the group other members might just follow this person and a bit more insecure persons won't say their opinions. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 66)

Depth interview

Depth interviews can be divided into three categories; clinical interview, guided interview and structured interview. These interviews last usually from one hour to several hours. Stimulus objects should be used, for example pictures or products. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 68)

Depth interviews are useful when finding out information on purchase decisions from a longer period of time or when investigating general decision making process in an organization. Also the minority opinions come out in depth interviews. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 68)

One big minus for the depth interview is often the lack of time. The interview itself takes time and also the material handling and analysis is time consuming. This is also the reason what makes this research method rather expensive. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 68)

7.5 Sampling

Instead of total research you can do a research based on sampling, which gives you an accurate enough result. Using sampling makes it possible to carry out a research both financially and also timely. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 105)

7.5.1 Defining the frame popular

There are several ways of carrying out sampling. When choosing a method, you have to know how accurate information is needed. Time and money are also important factors. Research always focuses on certain frame popular. When starting out a research,

the frame popular is defined as carefully as possible and accurate and up to date information is gathered. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 106)

In sampling after the frame popular it is time to define the sample unit. This can be one individual person, household or a company. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 108)

7.5.2 Defining the size of the sample group

Factors affecting the size of the sample group are: how accurate information is needed, time and money. Mostly the size of the sample group is solved based on an experience. The bigger the sample group the more accurate and reliable are the results, so when the results of the research affect big decisions also the sample group should be big enough to get reliable information. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 108)

According to Lotti (Lotti Leila, 1998) a normal sample group size for a national consumer survey is 1000, but even 500 gives a pretty good picture of the whole results. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 108)

According to Malhotra and Birks the minimum size for a marketing research is 200 when doing a problem solving research. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 351). But these figures are probably not suitable for a small country like Finland.

7.5.3 Sampling Methods

Sampling methods can be divided into probability and non-probability sampling. In probability sampling, sampling units are chosen in random, so everyone has the same chance to be chosen to the sample. When using a probability sampling you should very accurate information of the frame popular. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 109)

When doing a non-probability sampling, the chance to be chosen into sample is not the same for everyone anymore. In this method the researcher can decide whom to choose. Usually only the persons, customers or companies that are seen essential in order to solve the problem are taken into the sample. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 109)

7.5.4 No response issues in sampling

Whatever research method you use it is almost impossible to get response rate of 100%. This no response issue is one of the biggest problems when doing a research. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 115)

Reasons for this no response issue are for example the used register's information is not up to date, refusals to response, being absence for some reason. There are many ways to increase the response percentage. The researcher can visit again the respondent, send a reminder letter, call the respondent again. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 115) The response rate can be increased also by offering incentives, monetary on non-monetary. The most commonly used incentives are money, different kinds of offers or prizes. Well designed questionnaire has also a big impact on improving the response rate. Also a letter that sounds like it has been written personally to the respondent may increase the response rate. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 384)

8. QUESTIONNAIRE

In the following I will go through the preparing of the questionnaire, different question types and the measurement scales. And last it is showed how the questionnaire was tested.

8.1 Preparing the questionnaire

The first objective, and probably the most important one, is that when preparing questionnaire the questions are prepared so that those provide answers for the set research problem and the questions are formulated so that the people will answer those. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 137)

The second objective is to get the respondent motivated to answer the questions and become involved in the research so that they fill out the questionnaire completely and properly. A well formulated questionnaire can increase the response rate, which increases the reliability of the research. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 137) The questions should be clear and the questionnaire should not be too long. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 94)

The third objective is to minimize response error. A questionnaire can be a major source of response error. Minimizing this error is an important objective of questionnaire design. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 94)

8.2 Question types

Questions are divided into two main types; unstructured (open ended) and structured questions. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2007) Depth interviews are usually based on the use of unstructured questions. In an ordinary interview research mainly structured questions are used. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 73)

8.2.1 Unstructured questions

Unstructured questions are open-ended questions that the respondents answer in their own words. Open-ended questions are good as first questions on the topic. Through

open-ended questions the respondents are able to express general attitudes and opinions. Unstructured questions are useful in exploratory research because the answers can provide the researcher with rich insights. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 325)

Even though you get more in-depth information with unstructured questions there are also many disadvantages. One of those is the fact that when the interviewer writes down the main points, the data depends on the interviewer's skills. For this reason a tape recorder should always be used if verbatim recording is important. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 326)

Another disadvantage for these kinds of questions is that coding of responses is expensive and time consuming. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 326) There are several possibilities to get mistakes with these kinds of questions; the interviewer might present the questions in a wrong way, the respondent might interpret the question in another way than the interviewer has intended to or then the interviewer might misinterpret the respondents answer. This is the reason why the interviewer should be carefully selected. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 74)

There are three different types of unstructured questions; unlimited unstructured questions, helped unstructured questions, directed unstructured questions. Unlimited unstructured questions are used to find out spontaneous opinions. Helped unstructured questions are used to find out the knowledge of the respondent or finding out opinions. Directed unstructured questions are meant for finding out values, opinions and grounds for buying behaviour. The respondent can form his/her thoughts freely, but the directions of the thoughts are directed. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 73)

8.2.2 Structured questions

Structured questions are used to find out opinions, motives for buying behaviour, consuming habits or to find out how people think of certain product images or company image. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 75)

With structured questions the respondents are offered a set of response alternatives to choose from. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 75) A structured question may be multiple choice, dichotomous (yes or no questions) or a scale. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 327)

When preparing answer options you should make sure that there is not too many answering options, the answering options should not be overlapping. The respondent is asked to answer only for one thing at the time and the respondent has also an option to answer something entire else or just that they do not know. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 76)

8.2.3 Measurement scales

There are four different types of measurement scales. Nominal scale (quality difference scale) is the simplest one. This is used to measure how similar or different certain things are.

Ordinal scale (order scale) measures the order between certain things, but not the distance between these things. With this scale you can for example, put the competing products in an order from best to weakest or the other way round.

Interval scale (distance scale) is the best scale when making an interview or questionnaire researches. With this scale we can find out how much better some product is than the other.

Ratio scale is the highest scale. With this scale we can explain consumption amounts but opinions can not be measured with this scale. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 77-78)

When choosing a measurement scale we need to remember the research problem itself and how important information is needed. The more accurate information is needed the higher scale is needed. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 90-91)

8.3 Questionnaire pre-testing

Pre-testing refers to the testing of the questionnaire on a small sample of respondents to identify and eliminate the possible problems. No matter how well the questionnaire is done there usually always something that can be improved. The questionnaire should not be used without proper pre-testing. All areas of the questionnaire should be tested; question content, wording, sequences, form and the layout of the questionnaire and also the instructions should be tested. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 336)

If you pre-test the questionnaire you get information on the functionality of the questionnaire but also of the response rate, of the time consumed to answer the questions. This gives you idea if it works or should something be corrected. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 102) After the correction it is wise to do pre-testing again. If there is nothing to correct in the questionnaire, you can go ahead and carry out the research. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 336)

9. CARRYING OUT THE RESEARCH

In this chapter there is some information about the background of the research, why it was done and for what purpose. Then the data collection methods are checked. And finally the questions are gone through one by one or by group.

9.1 Background of the research

The research was done to collect basic information on the company customers and to get some kind of idea of the customers' satisfaction levels and what elements could be improved.

The company has not any kind of records of their customers, just some amounts how many persons stay on the farm during the year and for how many nights. That is why this research provides company with useful information to be used in their marketing in the future. This study also helps them when developing the accommodation premises.

9.2 Questionnaire pre-testing

Before the research the questionnaire was pre-tested on seven persons who have visited the company. Three of those were men and four females. There were only very small modifications that had to be done after the pre-testing. After the corrections the questionnaire was tested again. After the second test round the questionnaire seemed to be in order and the questionnaire was taken to the company, where the owner distributed the questionnaires to the customers.

9.3 Data collection method

Research method in this research is a quantitative research. The research was carried out as a survey research; the questionnaire was a method for data collection. This was basically almost the only option with this company, as they do not have customer records. This is also why I took the questionnaires directly to the company. In practice it was impossible to do any other kind of a survey, like for example, a mail survey.

9.4 Sample size

When deciding on the sample size I had to think about various aspects, such as what would be the minimum sample size I need for the research so that it is reliable. I also had to think about how many answers I could get, since the company is very small and I also had to consider for how long I could have the questionnaires at the case company. Since the amount of visitors per year is only around 500 I decided that the number of answers between 30 to 40 would be good. The questionnaires were given out at the case company from mid August to middle of October, for two months.

I did not use a special sampling method for two reasons; there is no record of the customers and the group of respondents formed of those people who happened to visit the case company during my research period.

9.5 Questions

The final questionnaire was two pages long. At the beginning of the questionnaire I introduced myself, who I am and what I am studying and why I am doing the research. I also informed the respondent of the possibility to win one free accommodation day at Farm Tourism Ilomäki.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections; general questions, visiting, service and premises and the last section was about overall image. With general questions I wanted to know what kind of people visit the company. In the visiting sections I wanted to know if the visitors had used the accommodation service before and how they got the information about the company and what was the purpose of their visit.

In service and premises sections I wanted to know the customers' satisfaction level on the service and premises. And at the end I asked the customers to give an overall grade for the company.

9.5.1 General questions

Questions one, two, three and five were structured questions where the respondent had different answering options to choose from. Question number four was an open-ended question about the municipality of residence.

With questions 1-5 the aim was to get information on the visitors themselves, like gender, age group, occupation, mother tongue and the living area. Already this is important information for the case company, since they do not have any kinds of records of their customers.

9.5.2 Visiting

Questions from number six to number eight were also structured questions, where the respondent had answer alternatives to choose from. With these questions the aim was to find out about customer loyalty. As we know satisfied customers tend to come again.

With questions six-eight I wanted to find out if the customers have visited the company before and how they had got the information about the case company. The purpose of the visit was also asked.

9.5.3 Service and premises

The aim for questions 9-15 was to find out what customers thought of the service and of the premises. Questions concerned different aspects of service, premises, location, road signs, price level, booking system, side services and the two last questions of this section were to express successful features or then the not successful features.

Questions from nine to eleven were structured questions with answer alternatives. Questions 12 and 13 were so called mixed questions, where there was answer options yes and no but the respondents could also express their opinion in their own words. Questions 14-15 were open-ended questions to give feedback for the case company.

Question nine was a multiple choice question about the different aspects of service. Question ten was also a multiple choice questions that concerned about the premises, and the location and road signs. Questions nine and ten had a scale from very satisfied to very dissatisfied and also an option “can’t say”.

Question 11 was about the price level, there was three options to choose from, cheap, right for the quality, expensive. Question 12 was about the company's room/ cottage booking system; there you had just options yes or no. If you answered no, there was a following question where I wanted to know what the customer wanted to improve in the booking system.

With question 13 I wanted to know if the customers were happy about the amount of the side services. Question 13 also had options yes and no, and if the response was no, there was an open-ended question where the respondent could tell what more was needed.

Questions 14-15 were open-ended questions to give feedback if the company had succeeded very well in something or then not so well in something.

9.5.4 Overall image

In question 16 the customer could give an overall grade for the company. In the last question, question 17, the customers could freely tell if they had some kind of development ideas or some other kind of feedback to give.

10. ANSWERS

As mentioned earlier the questionnaire was given out at the case company for two months, from mid August to mid October. During that time I got 33 answers, so the target 30-40 was reached.

During that time period the case company had 133 customers, so the response rate was 24,8 %. Almost every respondent had answered all the questions. When reading the results it can be assumed that the response rate is 100 %, if nothing else is mentioned.

I'll go through the questions one by one. Like the questions the answers are also divided into four sections; general questions, visiting, service and premises and overall image. After these there are a few words on cross tabulation and the last there is a summary of the responses. With open-ended questions the similar answers were combined so that repetition was avoided.

10.1 General questions

Gender

20 of the respondents were female, that is 61 % and 39 % male.

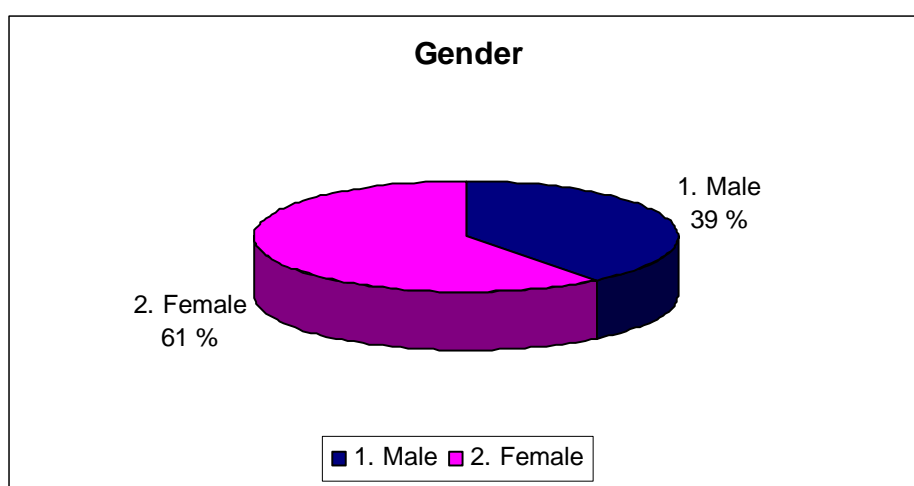


Table 1. Gender of the respondents

Age

The majority of the respondents were from age group 21-30, 37 % of the customers belonged to this age group. The second largest age group was 12-20 year of age with the percentage of 18 %. The other three age groups were equally large, 15 % per group.

The division of the age groups is as following:

- 12-20 years: 6 persons, 18 %
- 21-30 years: 12 persons, 37 %
- 31-40 years: 5 persons, 15 %
- 41-50 years: 5 persons, 15 %
- over 50 years: 5 persons, 15 %

This result was a little surprising; originally I assumed that the biggest customer group could be persons over 30, who would be there with their families. In this case the case company could check its marketing. The farm tourism is an ideal vacation place for children.

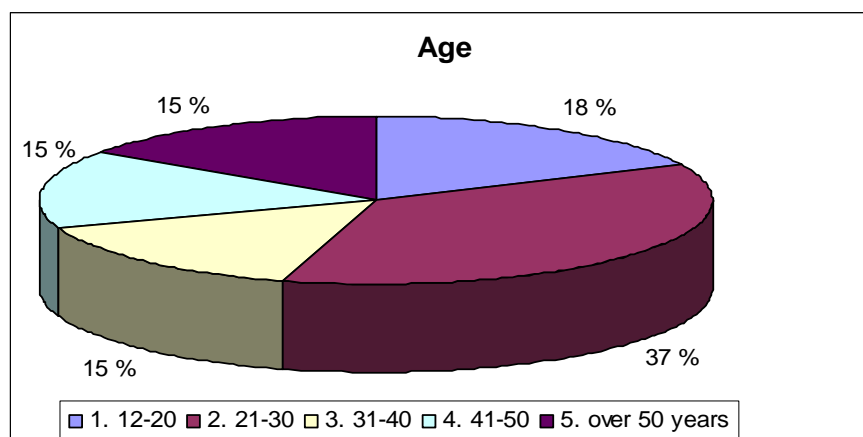


Table 2. Age groups of respondents

Occupational group

The largest occupational group were students, actually almost half, 46 % of the respondents were students. The next largest group were lower office employee, 15 % of respondents belonged to this group. The third biggest group was the option other, 12 %, to this group belonged mostly entrepreneurs and few workers. The rest of the occupational groups had equally large percentages, 9 %. The division of the occupational groups was as follows:

- Student: 15 persons, 46 %
- Lower office employee: 5 persons, 15 %
- Upper office employee: 3 persons, 9 %
- In managerial position: 3 persons, 9 %
- Pensioner: 3 persons, 9 %
- Other (entrepreneurs, worker): 4 persons, 12 %

OCCUPATIONAL GROUP

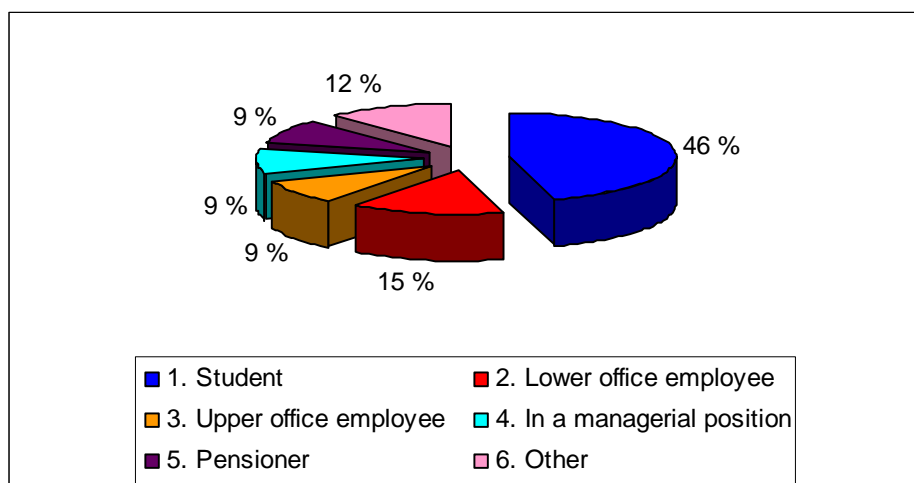


Table 3. Occupational groups of respondents

Municipality of residence

The majority of the respondents were from western Finland, 46 %. People from southern Finland were the second biggest group, 45 %, so there was just 1 % difference between these two groups. The rest of the customers came from Oulu region, 6 %, and from Lappi region, 3 %.

Most of the visitors were from Seinäjoki. In the second biggest group, most of the people came from Helsinki region.

COUNTY OF RESIDENCE

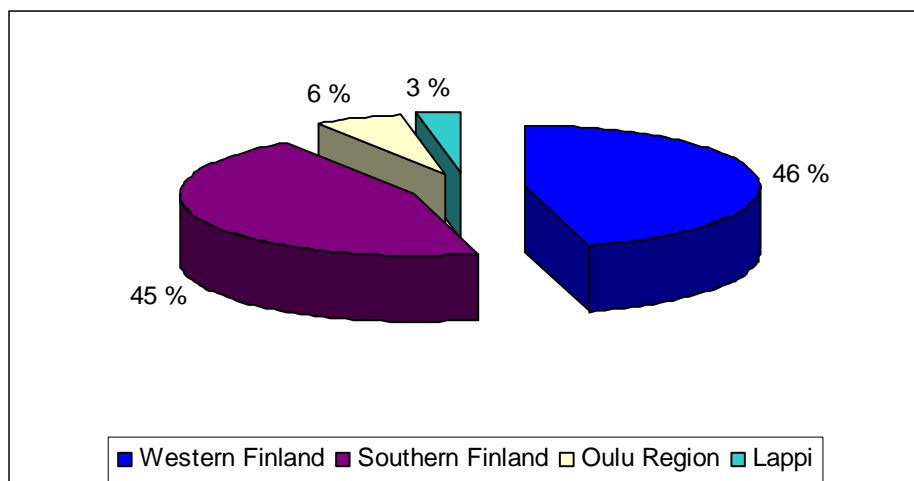


Table 4. County of residence of the respondents

Mother tongue

During this study period all the respondents were from Finland and all of their mother tongue was also Finnish.

10.2 Visiting

Have you visited the company before?

Over half of the customers had not visited the company before. 39 % of the respondents had visited the company before. This is quite a good rate and something about the company can be concluded from this percentage.



Table 5. Visiting

Where did you get the information on the company?

The options for this question were: the internet, company's own printed advertisement, fair, friend/acquaintance and somewhere else. The option friend/acquaintance got the most responses, total of 19, which is 51 %. This demonstrates how the information flows from mouth to mouth. The internet was the second most popular source of information with a percentage of 41 %. The third group was from somewhere else and here the sources were: school/teacher, phone book and also a competitor company from the same village. Networking seems to be worth while. Company's own printed advertisement and visiting fairs did not seem to be that effective ways to market the company. Again, perhaps the used marketing methods should be examined.

SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON THE COMPANY

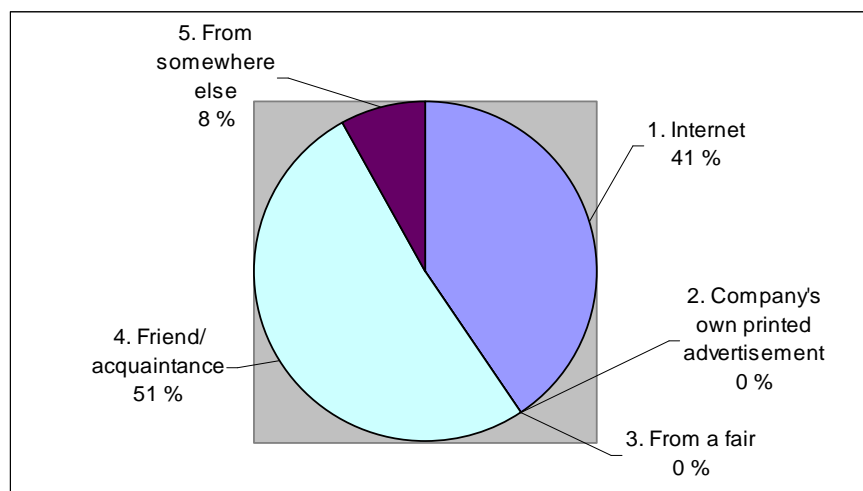


Table 6. Source of information on the company

Purpose of the visit

The majority of the respondents were on a holiday trip, 46 %. The second biggest group was for other reason, 36 %. I did not ask the respondents for the reasons if they chose other reason, but many of the respondents had added something, for example birthday party, school trip, participation in some competition. 18 % of people were on business trip, which is quite a large percentage.

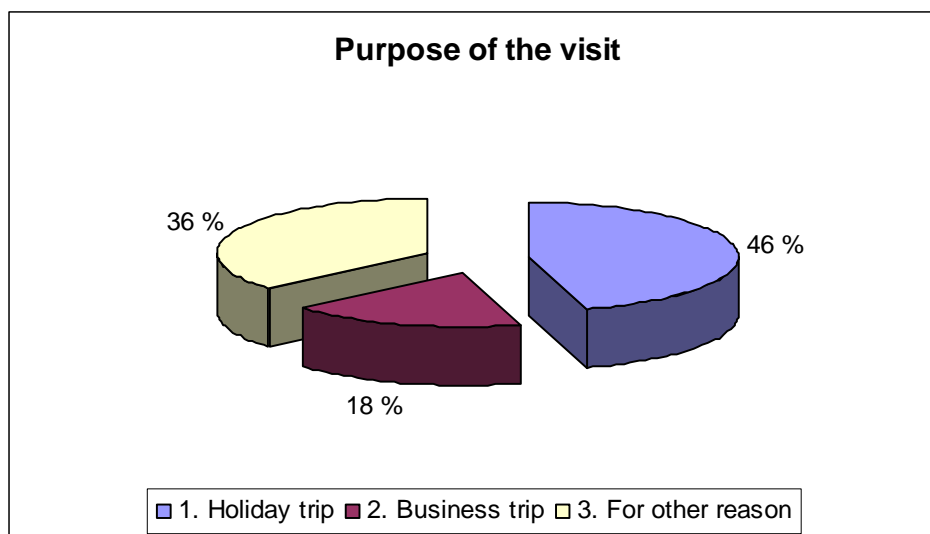


Table 7. Purpose of the visit

The questionnaire also had the following question. If the respondent answered that they were on holiday trip I wanted to know if they had their children with them. Eleven out of fifteen answered that they did not have children with them, this is 85 %. Only two persons out of fifteen said they had children with them, 15 % and two persons did not answer the following question at all. It seems that respondents were on a couple holidays, not on family holidays.



Table 8. Do you have children with you?

10.3 Service and premises

In this section I wanted to ask the customers how satisfied they were with certain aspects of the company.

Service quality

Almost 90 % of the respondents were very satisfied with the service quality and this rate is very good. The next largest group was fairly satisfied with percentage of 9 %. The third largest group was “can’t say”, with 3 %. There were no responses in groups fairly or very dissatisfied, which is also a very good result.

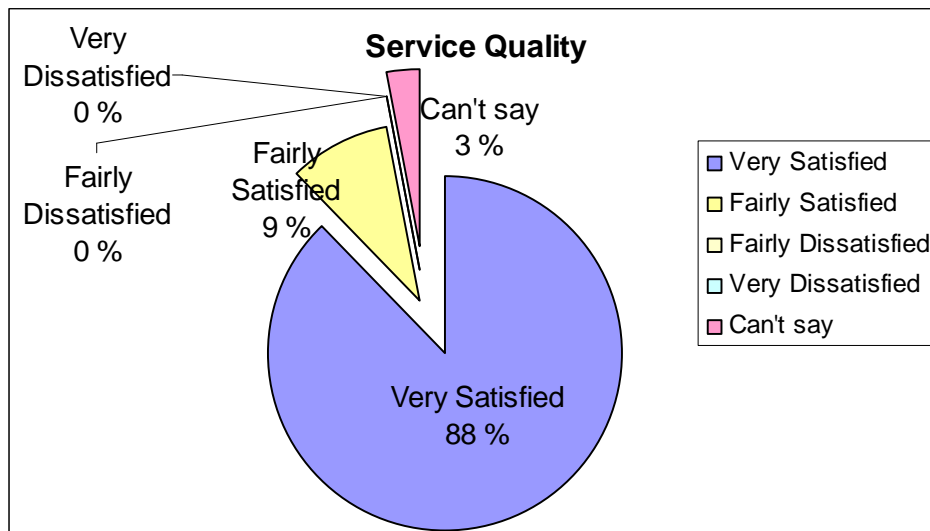


Table 9. Service quality

Service speed

Also here the largest group was very satisfied at 91 %. As expected the second largest group was fairly satisfied, 6 %. Again, the third largest group was “can’t say”, 3 %. There were no fairly or very dissatisfied ones at all.

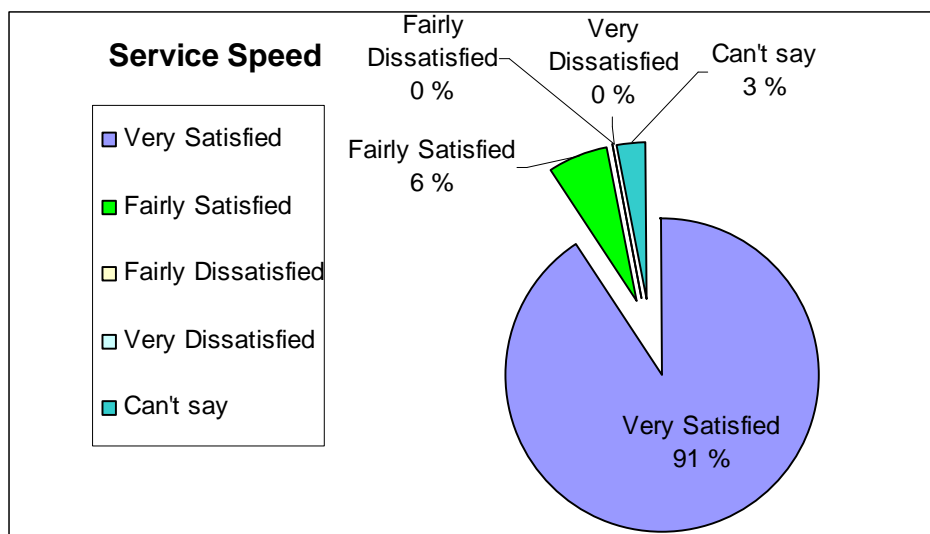


Table 10. Service speed

Willingness to serve

Here the very satisfied scored the highest percentage. 94 % of the respondents were very satisfied with service speed. Fairly satisfied and “can’t say” groups had equal number of responses, both groups got 3 % of all responses. Again, there was no fairly or very dissatisfied ones at all.

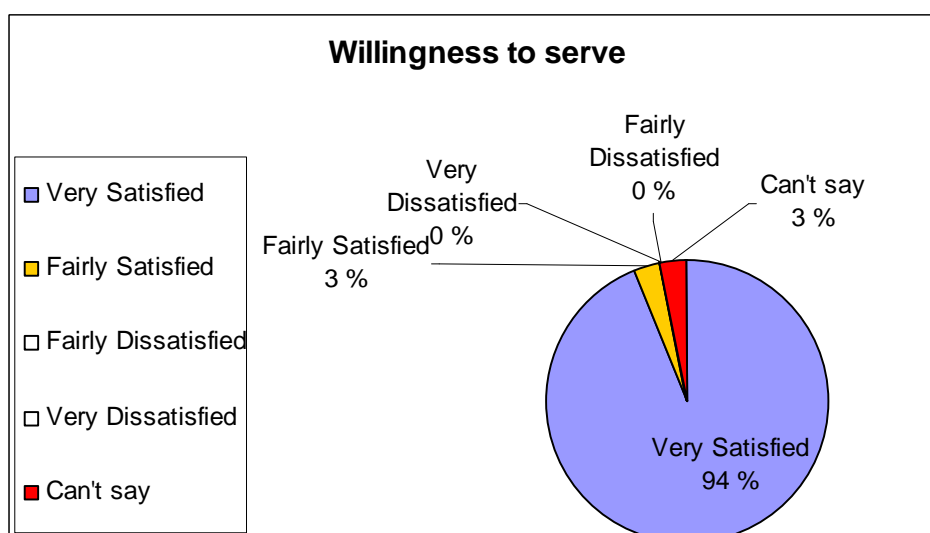


Table 11. Willingness to serve

Offered services/ side services

With this question the standard deviation is bigger than in the other questions. The very satisfied are the largest group, 55 % of the respondents were very satisfied with the offered services/ side services. The second largest group was the “can’t say” group; 27 % of all respondents could not evaluate the services/ side services. Fairly satisfied of all respondents were 18 %. There were no fairly or very dissatisfied respondents. The large percentage of “can’t say” group can easily be explained. Many of the respondents had written beside their answer that their stay had been too short to answer this question.

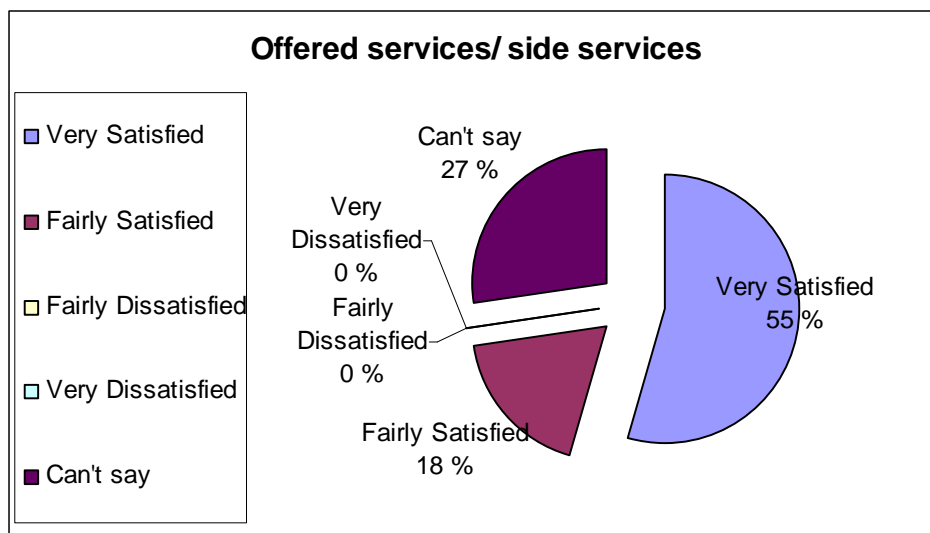


Table 12. Side services

Service friendliness

In this question the case company also scored a very high percentage with the very satisfied group. 94 % of all the respondents were very satisfied with the service friendliness. Fairly satisfied and can’t say groups scored equal percentage amounts, both got 3 % of all answers. There were no fairly or very dissatisfied respondents.

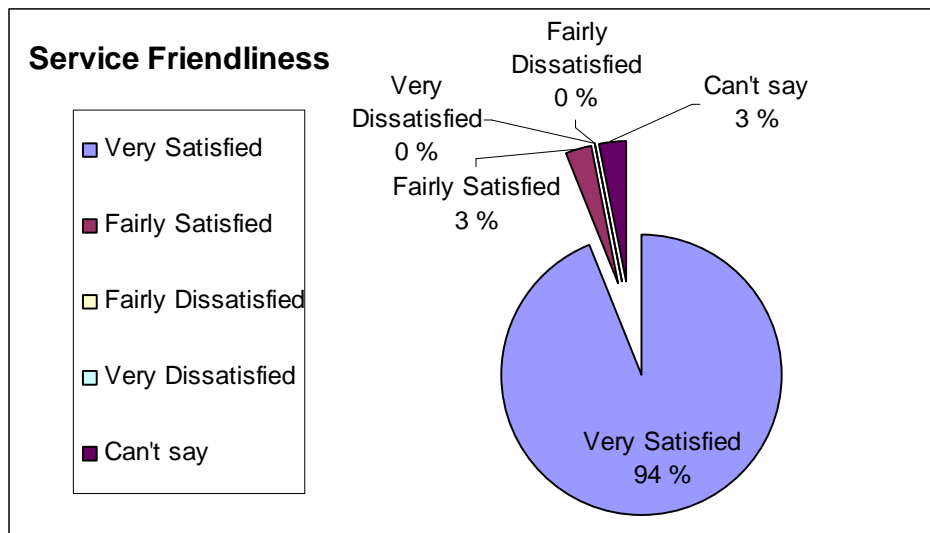


Table 13. Service friendliness

Accommodation premises

70 % of all the respondents were very satisfied with accommodation premises. The second largest group was fairly satisfied with 27 %. “Can’t say” was the third largest group with 3 %. And again fairly and very dissatisfied scored 0 %.

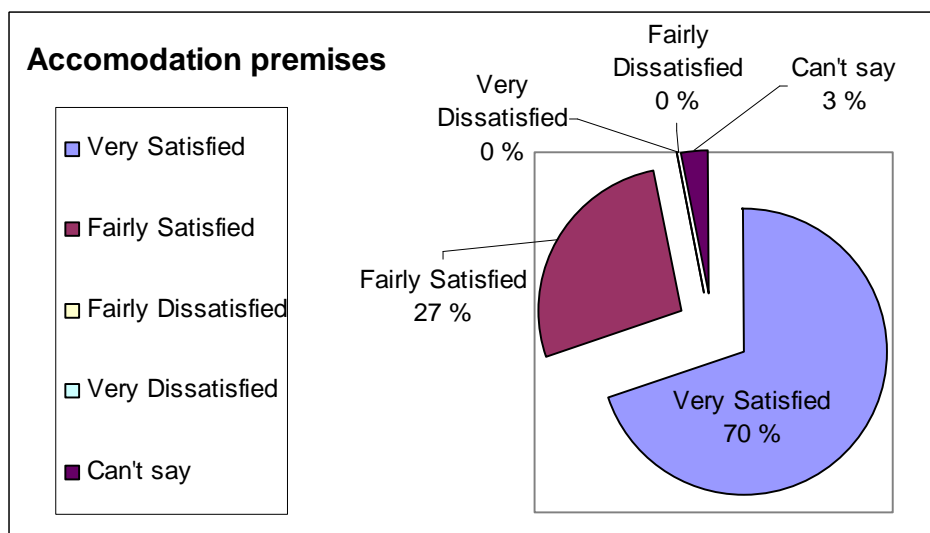


Table 14. Accommodation premises

Sauna/ washing facilities

52 % of all respondents were very satisfied with sauna and washing facilities. The second largest group were the fairly satisfied with 45 %. Can't say group scored 3 % of all responses and fairly and very dissatisfied 0 %.

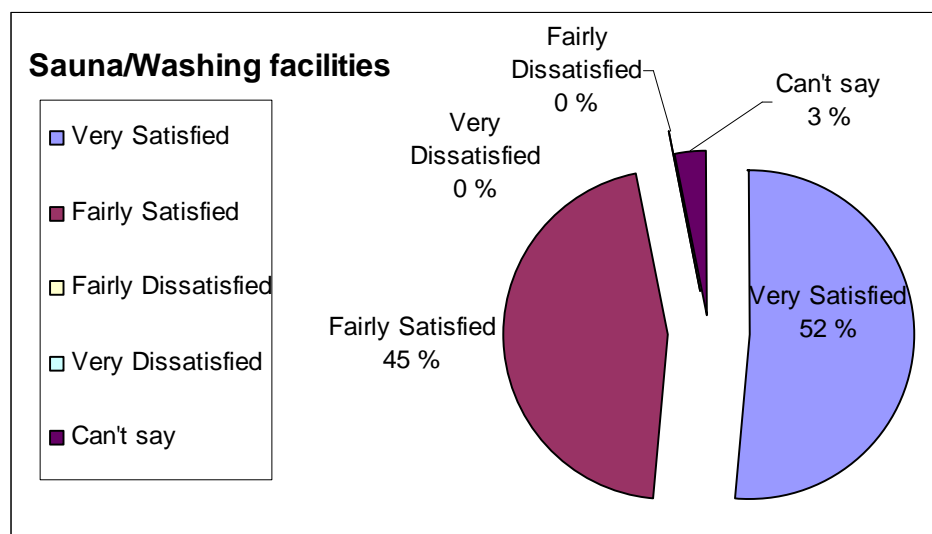


Table 15. Sauna and washing facilities

Tidiness of the premises

64 % of all respondents were very satisfied with the tidiness of the premises. 12 % were fairly satisfied. Fairly dissatisfied and can't say groups both got 3 % of all answers. Fairly and very dissatisfied groups both got 0 % of all the answers.

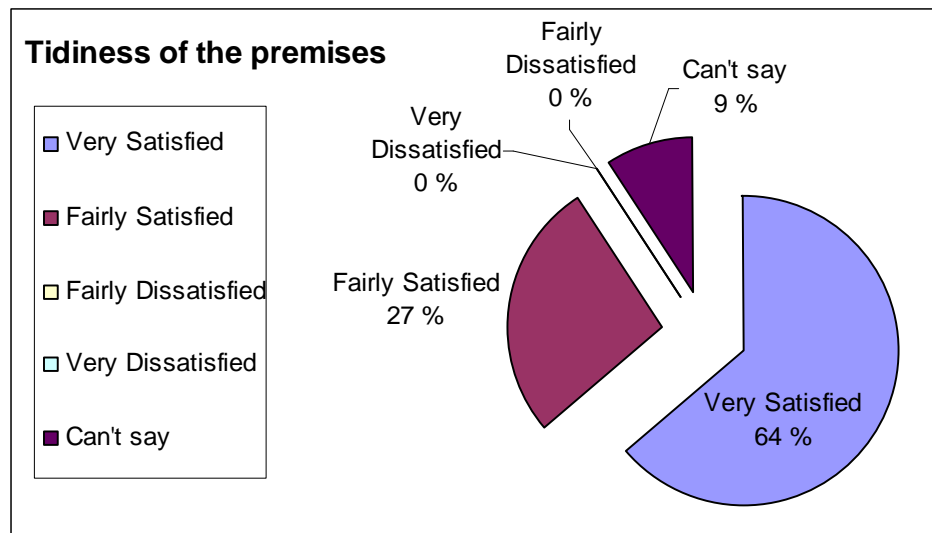


Table 16. Tidiness of the premises

Location

Very satisfied was the largest group of respondents with 64 %. With 24 % fairly satisfied was the second largest group. Fairly dissatisfied and can't say groups both scored 6 %. No one was very dissatisfied. Location is something that is difficult to change, perhaps the company should emphasize that the place is located in quite a remote place and is meant for those who want to enjoy nature and silence.

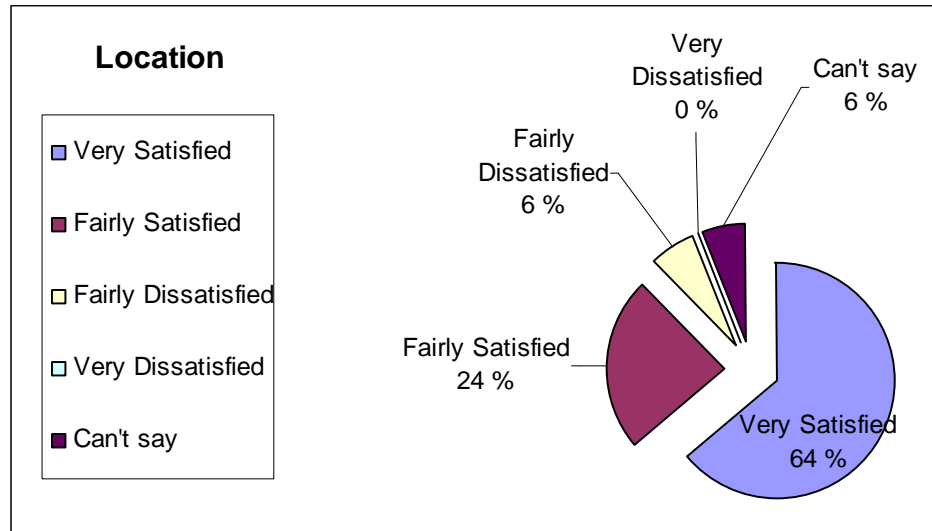


Table 17. Location

Road signs

82 % of all respondents were very satisfied with the road signs and felt that it was easy to locate the company. Fairly satisfied was the second largest group of respondents with 12 % of all answers. Fairly dissatisfied and “can’t say” groups both got an equal number of responses, their percentages were 3 %. No one was very dissatisfied.

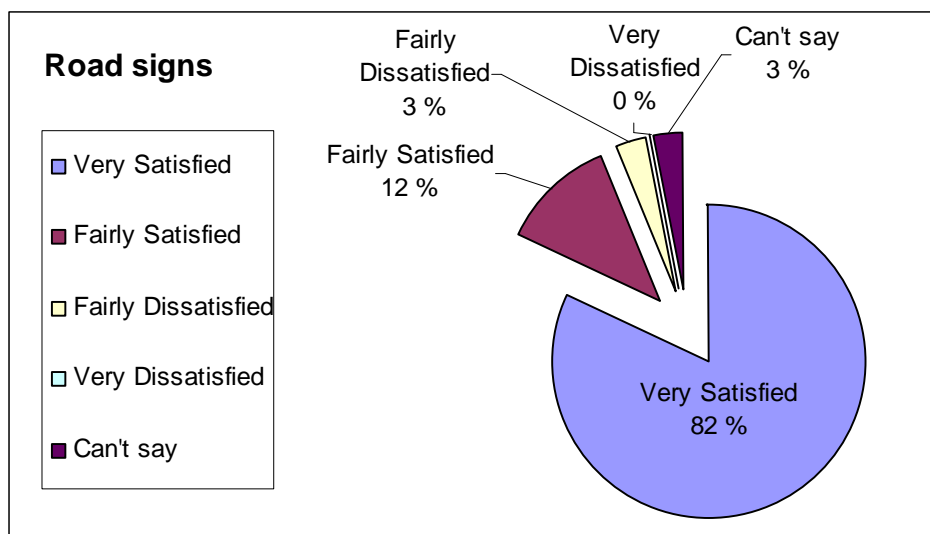


Table 18. Road signs

Price level

For this question there was three answering options, cheap, right for the quality and expensive. The majority thought that the price level is right for the quality, 53 % of the respondents chose this option. 44 % thought that the price level was cheap. The rest, which is 3 %, thought that the price level is expensive. One person did not answer the question.

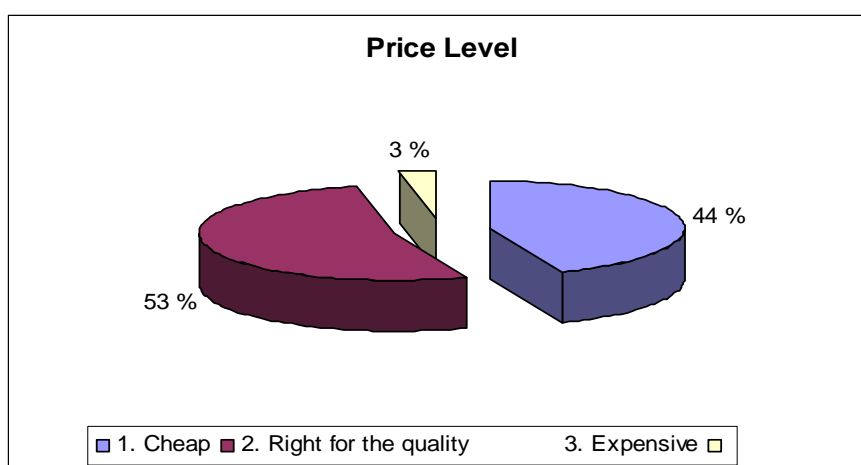


Table 19. Price level

Does the room/ cottage booking system work well?

Here all the respondents were happy with the booking system, which usually takes place by phone. Obviously no one wanted to have, for example, an internet booking system. One person did not answer the question at all.

Is there enough side services?

97 % of all the respondents thought that there are enough side services. Only three percent thought that there are not. There were also four persons who did not answer the question and most of them had added next to the question that their stay was too short to answer this question.

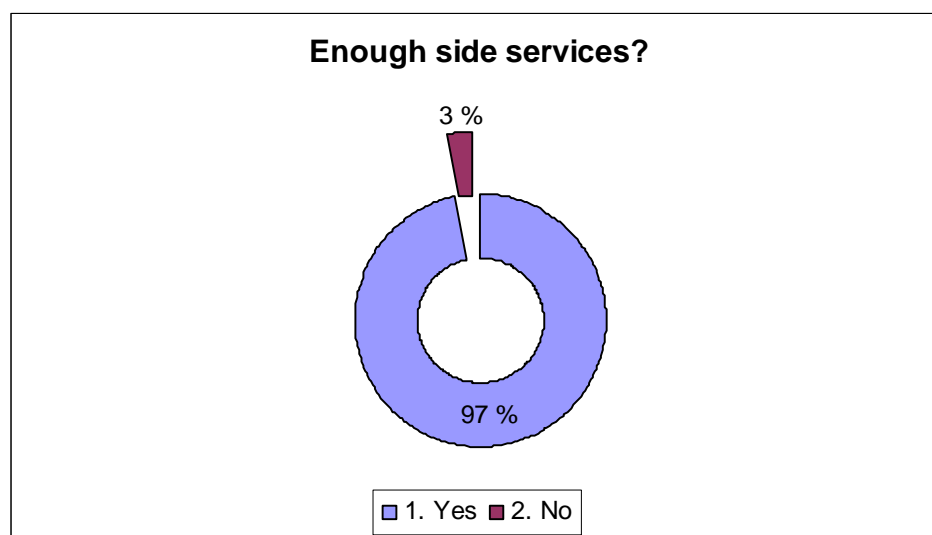


Table 20. Enough side services?

Is there something where farm tourism Ilomäki has succeeded well or very well?

Most of the feedback was about the very good service they got, there was several praising words used of the service, like open, friendly, very nice, excellent. Some one also wanted to thank for the fact that warm sauna was waiting for the travellers. Then a few answered that farm tourism Ilomäki has succeeded well in everything. Good tidy facilities were also thanked. Some people were very happy with the location of

the facilities, especially the location of the cottage was praised and why not; as it is next to a small stream and in absolute silence in the middle of Finnish countryside. The guests appreciated the peace and quietness.

People felt that the place is very home-like and willingness to serve is excellent and the surroundings are clean. One guest also praised the company's internet pages. Ten of the respondents did not answer this question but then again the others thanked for many things.

Here is the list where the company had succeeded well or very well according to the customers:

Service: 16 persons

Good and tidy accommodation facilities: 4 persons

Succeeded in everything: 4 persons

Home-like atmosphere: 2 persons

Location: 4 persons

Willingness to serve: 1 person

Clean/neat surroundings: 1 person

Peaceful surroundings: 2 persons

Internet pages: 2 persons

Is there something where farm tourism Ilomäki has not succeeded so well?

For this question most of the people had answered that there is nothing to complain about or then they just had not answered anything. Only one person claimed that there should not be so much stuff in the accommodation facilities.

10.4 Overall image

On scale 1-5 what grade would you give to farm tourism Ilomäki? (1=Very good, 5=Very bad)

Out of 33 respondents 22 gave grade one, that is 69 %. The other half gave a grade 2, so that is out of 33 respondents 10 gave grade 2, the percentage is 31 %. Grades from three to five got 0 answers.

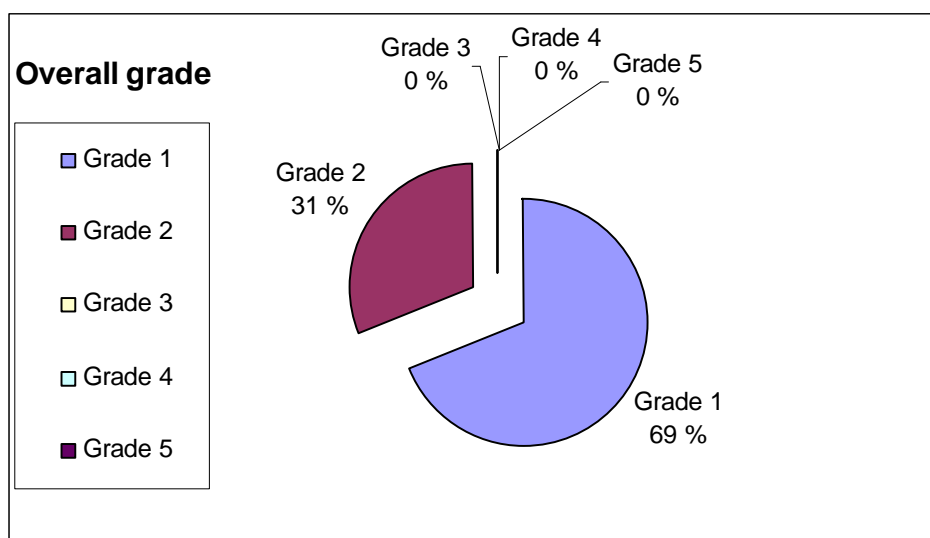


Table 21. Overall grade

Development ideas or some other feedback?

Most of the feedback was thanks to the company owners for excellent service. Some of the respondents told that they would recommend the place to their friends as well.

Then there were a few development ideas also. Those are:

Outdoor jacuzzi: 3 persons

Please check the sauna seat fastenings: 1 person

Dishwasher: 2 persons

10.5 Cross tabulation

Often when doing a customer satisfaction surveys, cross tabulation is done. In this case when all the answers were so similar and there was such a minimal amount of deviation with the answers, I decided not to do this, since I did not think there was point in doing that. Most of the respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied. Just in few questions there were some respondents who were fairly dissatisfied and no respondent was very dissatisfied with any question area.

10.6 Summary of the answers

Majority of the respondents were female, 61 %. The division to age groups was as follows: 12-20 years 18 %, 21-30 years 37 %, 31-40 years, 15 %, 41-50 years 15 %, over 50 years 15 %. So the largest age group was 21-30 year-old people. Clearly the largest occupational group was students with 46 %. The second largest occupational group was lower office employees with 15 %. The rest of the occupational groups got almost equal percentages. The occupational group “others” included mostly entrepreneurs, only one respondent in this group said he was a worker the others were entrepreneurs. The majority of the respondents came from western Finland, 46% which is almost half of the respondents. Another half, 45 % of the respondents, came from Southern Finland, mostly around Helsinki region. Oulu region got 6 % and Lappi 3 %. During the research period all the respondents were Finnish speaking.

Many of the respondents were visiting the case company for the first time, but still 39 % of all the respondents had already visited the company before. Most of the respondents found the information on the company either on the internet or heard it from a friend or an acquaintance. Some respondents had used the old-fashioned method and checked from the phone book and some had got the information from a competing company, in the same village.

The majority of the respondents were on a holiday trip, 46 %. Surprisingly many were also there on business, 18%, even though the second biggest reason was other reason, for example a birthday party, a competition trip or a school trip. When re-

spondents were on a holiday trip, only 15 % had their children with them and 85 % did not.

When the respondents were judging service, the majority of the people were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the service. Willingness to serve and service friendliness got the highest scores, out of 33 respondents 31 were very satisfied with service speed and willingness to serve. When respondents were asked to judge the offered side services, there was a little more deviation, 55 % were very satisfied, 18 % fairly satisfied and 27 % could not say. Most of the respondents who had answered “can’t say” had added that their stay was too short or then they just had not used any of the additional services.

When judging the premises and the location, there was a little more deviation than when judging the service. The majority, 70 %, was satisfied with the accommodation premises, 27 % was fairly satisfied and 3 % could not say. A bit over half, 52 %, was very satisfied with the sauna and washing facilities, 45 % was fairly satisfied and again 3 % could not say. 64 % of the respondents were very satisfied with the tidiness of the premises, 27 % fairly satisfied and 9 % could not say. Over half of the respondents were very satisfied with the company’s location, 24 % fairly satisfied, 6 % fairly dissatisfied and 6 % could not say. The majority of the people felt that the company was easy to find and there were enough road signs. Only 3 % was fairly dissatisfied and that is just one person out of 33. Most of the respondents thought that the price level was just right for the quality or then cheap. Only one person thought that the price level was expensive. All the respondents were happy with the room or cottage booking system. Almost everyone also thought that there were enough additional services. Only one had answered that there weren’t enough side services. There were few non responses and they all had written that their stay was too short to answer this question.

When people were asked to tell freely if the company had succeeded well or very well in something, the company got a lot of thanks for their customer service and

willingness to serve. The neat and home-like premises got thanks as well as the internet pages. Location had pleased many customers, mainly the quiet location where one could enjoy peace and quietness and nature. When people were asked to give also feedback on things where the company had not succeeded that well, there was only one answer where that respondent wanted to have slightly less stuff in the premises.

On a scale from 1-5 (1=Very good, 5=Very bad), the majority of the respondents would give the company a grade 1 for an overall grade, that is 69 %. 31 % would give grade 2. The company got few development ideas, to get an outdoor jacuzzi, a dishwasher and to check up the fastening of the sauna seats, one person had also asked the company to hide or take away some of the excess stuff. Again excellent customer service was thanked.

11. CONCLUSIONS

As a final summary one might say that overall the customers are very satisfied with the service and with the premises. Especially the customer service seems to be excellent and that is something that is very important to keep at the same level as it is now.

Mouth to mouth communication seems to be the most effective way to spread information on the site and also networking seems to be worthwhile. Most people use the company's services for holiday trips. Since quite many of the respondents were on business trip this aspect should also be taken into consideration.

There are quite evenly people from all age and occupational groups. What could be further considered is the surprisingly low amount from age group 31-40 years. This is the age group that has children and steady income. If the company could increase this age group they could also get more families as customers. Of course one fact affecting the number of respondents from this age group is that people with families tend to have holiday trips when children have holidays from school. During my research period there was the autumn break, but that is such a short break that it does not really increase the number of families.

In this research there was very little negative feedback, but this does not mean that the company can just keep on going the same way as it is doing at the moment. Ways to improve company services should always be considered. There is always something that can be done better than your competitors. There were few development ideas for the company which can be carried out.

Overall customers were very happy with the case company's services and many of them had already visited the company and will probably visit again concluding from the excellent grades people gave to the company.

12. CONNECTIONS TO THE THEORETICAL

In the beginning of the theoretical study, the customer concept was explained, the traditional view and also the view according to customer satisfaction leadership's point of view. The fact that someone is somehow in contact with the company can make that person a customer, she/he does not necessarily need to buy anything.

It is also crucial for the company to know what factors affect customer satisfaction, which is why factors affecting customer satisfaction were examined. It is important to know how people's expectations and experiences affect their satisfaction level. The goal for every company is to create long-term customer relationships and get loyal customers. It is important to understand the process how a potential customer will become a loyal recommender. Only this way you can understand what needs to be done to create these kinds of relationships. The more satisfied the customers are the bigger the chance that they become loyal customers. In this research 41 % of all customers had already visited the company and overall customers were very happy with the company's operations which proves that there is very good chance for the company to get more loyal customers.

Every company will also face dissatisfied customers at some point, this is inevitable. If the company does not want to lose its customers it should be prepared and also understand how much damage a dissatisfied customer can cause to the company. People tend to tell about their negative experiences more easily than the do about their positive experiences. It is crucial for the company to solve all problems with dissatisfied customers; this is also a good way to learn something. Luckily the case company Ilomäki did not really have dissatisfied customers, only a few people had some complaints about the location and the road signs.

Since customer service has a huge role in customer satisfaction, a researcher should know, what is good customer service, what a good customer service consists of. This leads us to the fact that having a good staff is one of the most important elements for a successful company. As was seen in the research networking is important for the

company, in networking both parties can get advantages of this kind of a relationship. Ilomäki scored excellent percentages of very satisfied customers in every aspect of service.

In 4-P model product decisions mean decisions about products that the company is going to market. When doing a customer satisfaction research you should ask the customers how they feel about the products. Price is usually one very visible to the customer and many of the customers decide to which company they go based on the price level. This means that the price should be correct in order to get and keep customers. This aspect what do they think of the company's price level that should always be asked from the customers when doing a satisfaction research,. When talking about availability (placing) this means that customer should get the desired product or service fast and easily.

The case company's core product is to provide quality accommodation. They obviously have fulfilled this very well, since in every question about premises the percentage exceeded 50 % in very satisfied customers. The customers were also asked about the price level and the majority thought that the price was either good for the quality or cheap. Only one person thought it was expensive and therefore it can be concluded that, pricing was done correctly. People were also very happy with the accommodation booking system and 91 % of the respondents were very satisfied with the service speed.

13. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The first condition for the reliability of a research is that the research is done by following the criteria set for scientific research. The measurements goodness and reliability can be described with two concepts: reliability and validity. (Heikkilä Tarja, 2004, 185)

Reliability means the stability of the results. This means that if the study is carried out again will similar results be achieved. (Malhotra, Naresh K., Birks David F., 2000, 305) Reliability is the better the less chance has to do with the results. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 33) The reasons that cause defective reliability usually have to do with sampling, different measurement and handling mistakes. (Heikkilä Tarja, 2004)

The researcher has to be accurate and critical throughout the research. Mistakes might happen when, collecting, feeding and handling the information, or interpreting the results. (Heikkilä Tarja, 2004, 30)

I do consider that my research is reliable, since if I would do the research again the results would most likely be similar to than what they are now. What might cause some weakening of the reliability is that there were a few questions where some of the respondents had not answered the questions, but the number of no responses was minimal.

Validity means that have you measured that what was supposed to measure. (Lotti Leila, 1998, 33) In practice this means that with the chosen research method and questions provide information that answers the research problem.

I do consider that my research is valid. The target for my research was to measure customer satisfaction level and that target was reached. I also got the wanted amount of responses to my questionnaires.

Content validity inspects the fact that how widely the measuring method covers the phenomenon that is being researched. If the method enlightens the researched phenomenon only partially then the content validity is probably not that good. (<http://www.helsinki.fi/mm/suitia/mittaus/teoria3.htm>)

The goal for my research was to measure how satisfied the customers are with the premises, service and location. I do think that my questions were relevant and with the questions a good perception of the customer satisfaction was reached. Based on this I can say that my research's content validity is good.

Internal validity means that concepts, hypotheses and conclusions have to be consistent. Correctness of the information can be analysed only by doing an assessment of the consistency of the research. The internal validity basically means how well the researcher handles his field of science.

(<http://herkules.oulu.fi/isbn9514264053/html/x659.html>)

The questionnaire was done by me and it is based on theory. If Farm Tourism Ilomäki had done the questionnaire, it wouldn't necessary have followed the theoretical study and would not have been consistent. The Farm Tourism Ilomäki was consulted when forming the questionnaire questions so they were not left outside the research.

I do consider that the research is valid considering the internal validity, the research was consistent and the research method was scientific. The questions are based on the theoretical. The results of the research are shown as clearly as possible in order to avoid misinterpretations.

External validity means that can you generalise the research results to apply on a bigger group and how reliable these generalisations are.

(<http://herkules.oulu.fi/isbn9514272463/html/x321.html>)

I can consider the external validity of my research as good, since I got the wanted number of answers. The response rate was also quite good, 24,8 %. Both genders were represented well and there were also people from all age groups.

14. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The research is now over and results are available. In this case the results were very good; the customers are satisfied with almost every aspect of the company's operations. However, there is always something that could be improved.

I would suggest that the case company would carry out a new customer satisfaction survey after a while, for example, after two years, in order to monitor has customer satisfaction stayed the same or has the satisfaction level decreased.

Another research suggestion is to find out why there were so few families as customers, even though this kind of place would be ideal for families with children. It would be useful to know the ways to get more families as customers.

CLOSING WORDS

The research taught time management and patience, since I have been building a house at the same time and also had a big project at work. At the beginning I did not think that I would write this many pages but as the work progressed, I had so many things that I did not want to leave out and here we are, almost a hundred pages of text!

Writing the theoretical was the most time consuming and nerve wrecking part of the research, I was very relived when that part was over. Doing the questionnaire itself was much more interesting and that part also went much faster. When doing this thesis I probably went through more books than what I ever have during my studies.

I must say that this has been a very challenging task and I am so glad it is finally over. I hope that the case company can use the results in their operations.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 Questionnaire

APPENDIX 2 Kyselylomake

QUESTIONNAIRE

I'm Marjo Tuomi and I am a student in a Vaasa University of Applied Sciences.
With this questionnaire I'm researching the customer satisfaction level of Farm Tourism Ilomäki.

By answering the following questions you can win one free accomodation day
in Farm Tourism Ilomäki and you will also help Farm Tourism Ilomäki to develop their services.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Circle the right alternative

1. Gender

1. Male 2. Female

2. Age

1. 12-20 2. 21-30 3. 31-40
 5. over 50
4. 41-50 years

3. Occupational Group

1. Student 2. Lower office employee
3. Upper office employee 4. In a managerial position
5. Pensioner 6. Other, what _____?

4. Municipality of residence _____?

5. Mother tongue

1. Finnish 2. Swedish 3. Other, what _____?

VISITING

Circle the right alternative

6. Have you visited the company before?

1. Yes 2. No

7. Where did you get the information of the company?

1. Internet
2. Company's own printed advertisement
3. From a fair
4. Friend/ acquaintance
5. From somewhere else, from where _____?

8. Purpose of the visit

1. Holiday trip
2. Business trip
3. For other reason

If you are on holiday trip, do you have your children with you?

1. Yes
2. No

SERVICE AND PREMISES

9. How satisfied you are for the following services?

Choose an alternative that corresponds your opinion the best

	Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Can't say
A. Service Quality	1	2	3	4	5
B. Service speed	1	2	3	4	5
C. Willingness to serve	1	2	3	4	5
D. Offered services/side services	1	2	3	4	5
E. Service friendli- ness	1	2	3	4	5

10. How satisfied you are on the following?

Choose an alternative that corresponds your opinion the best

	Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Can't say
A. Accomodation premises	1	2	3	4	5
B. Sauna/washing facilities	1	2	3	4	5
C. Tidiness of the premises	1	2	3	4	5
D. Location	1	2	3	4	5
E. Road signs	1	2	3	4	5

11. What do you think of the price level, is it

1. Cheap
2. Right for the quality
3. Expensive

12. Does the room/ cottage booking system work well?

1. Yes
2. No

If you answered no, what would you like to be improved?

13. Are there enough side services?

1. Yes 2. No

If you answered no, what services you would like to have more?

14. Is there something where Farm Tourism Ilomäki has succeeded well or very well?

15. Is there something where Farm Tourism Ilomäki has not succeeded so well?

OVERALL IMAGE**16. On scale 1-5 what grade would you give to Farm Tourism Ilomäki?**

(1=Very good, 5=Very poor)

1 2 3 4 5

17. Development ideas or some other feedback?

Thank you for your answers and good luck in the allotment!

LOTTERY TICKET

If you wish to join the allotment, fill out the information below. The winner will be notified personally.

NOTE! only a completely filled questionnaire will join the allotment

Name:

Address:

Phone Number:

All the given information will be handled confidentially and the information is not used on direct marketing.

KYSELYLOMAKE

Olen Marjo Tuomi ja opiskelen Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulussa.

Kartoitan tällä tutkimuksella Maatilamatkailu Ilomäen asiakastyytyväisyyttä

Vastaamalla seuraaviin kysymyksiin voit voittaa yhden majoitusvuorokauden

Maatilamatkailu Ilomäessä ja autat Maatilamatkailu Ilomäkeä kehittämään toimintaansa.

YLEISET KYSYMYKSET

Ympyröi oikea vaihtoehto

1. Sukupuoli

1. Mies 2. Nainen

2. Ikä

1. 12-20 2. 21-30 3. 31-40
4. 41-50 5. Yli 50 vuotta

3. Ammattiryhmä

1. Opiskelija
3. Ylempi toimihenkilö
5. Eläkeläinen
2. Alempi toimihenkilö
4. Johtavassa asemassa oleva
6. Muu, mikä _____?

4. Asuinkunta _____?

5. Äidinkieli

1. Suomi 2. Ruotsi 3. Muu, mikä _____?

ASIOINTI

Ympyröi oikea vaihtoehto

6. Oletteko asioineet yrityksessä aiemmin

1. Kyllä 2. Ei

7. Mistä saitte tiedon yrityksestä?

- | | | |
|-----------------|--|-------------|
| 1. Internetistä | 2. Yrityksen omasta painetusta mainoksesta | |
| | | 5. Muualta, |
| 3. Messuilta | 4. Ystävältä/tuttavalta | mistä ? |

8. Vierailun tarkoitus

1. Lomamatka 2. Työmatka 3. Muu syy

Mikäli olette lomamatkalla, ovatko lapsenne mukana

1. Kyllä 2. Ei

PALVELU JA TILAT**9. Miten tyytyväinen olet seuraaviin palveluihin?**

Valitse yksi mielipidettäsi parhaiten vastaava vaihtoehto.

	Erittäin tyytyväinen	Melko tyytyväinen	Melko tyytymätön	Erittäin tyytymätön	En osaa sanoa
A. Palvelun laatu	1	2	3	4	5
B. Palvelun nopeus	1	2	3	4	5
C. Palvelualttius	1	2	3	4	5
D. Palvelutarjonta/oheispalvelut	1	2	3	4	5
E. Palvelun ystävällisyys	1	2	3	4	5

10. Miten tyytyväinen olet seuraaviin?

Valitse yksi mielipidettäsi parhaiten vastaava vaihtoehto.

	Erittäin tyytyväinen	Melko tyytyväinen	Melko tyytymätön	Erittäin tyytymätön	En osaa sanoa
A. Majoitustilat	1	2	3	4	5
B. Sauna/pesutilat	1	2	3	4	5
C. Tilojen siisteys	1	2	3	4	5
D. Yrityksen sijainti	1	2	3	4	5
E. Opasteet perille	1	2	3	4	5

11. Onko hintataso mielestäsi?

1. Edullinen 2. Sopiva laatuun nähden 3. Kallis

12. Onko huoneen/mökin varausjärjestelmä mielestäsi toimiva?

1. Kyllä 2. Ei

Mikäli vastasit ei, miten haluaisitte järjestelmää parannettavan?

13. Onko oheispalveluja mielestäsi riittävästi?

1. Kyllä 2. Ei

Mikäli vastasit ei, mitä palveluja kaipaisitte lisää?

14. Missä Maatilamatkailu on mielestäsi onnistunut hyvin tai erittäin hyvin?**15. Onko jotain, missä mielestäsi ei ole onnistuttu?****KOKONAISKUVA****16. Miten arvioit Maatilamatkailu Ilomäen toimintaa kokonaisuudessaan asteikolla 1-5?**

(1=erittäin hyvä, 5=erittäin huono)

1

2

3

4

5

17. Kehitysehdotuksia tai muuta palautetta?**Kiitoksia vastauksistanne ja onnea arvontaan!****ARVONTALIPUKE**

Jos haluatte osallistua arvontaan, täyttäkää alla olevat tiedot. Voittajalle ilmoitetaan henkilökohtaisesti

HUOM! vain kokonaan täytetty lomake osallistuu arvontaan!

Nimi:**Osoite:****Puhelinnumero:**

Kaikki antamanne tiedot käsitellään luottamuksellisesti eikä niitä käytetä suoramarkkinointiin.